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Toxic heavy metals found in firecrackers, says NGO

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Mkts end higher in special Muhurat trading session

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Pant to lead India A in prelude to Test series vs SA

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H1B fee of USD 1,00,000 won't apply to status change: US

NEW YORK, 21 OCT

The USD 1,00,000 fee recently imposed on new H1B visa petitions by the Trump administration will not apply to applicants seeking a "change of status" or an "extension of stay," the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) clarified in updated guidelines on Monday.

The fee, part of President Trump's 19 September proclamation restricting certain nonimmigrant workers, applies only to new petitions filed by individuals outside the United States who require a visa to enter the country. Current H1B holders seeking extensions or changing visa status within the US remain exempt. The proclamation also does not affect visas issued prior to 21 September, 2025, and does not restrict travel for existing H1B holders, allowing them to re-enter the country without paying the additional charge.

- The fee applies only to new petitions filed by individuals outside the United States who require a visa to enter the country.

The clarification comes amid concerns from US employers and foreign professionals, particularly from India, who constitute around 71 per cent of H1B applicants. Companies had expressed anxiety that the USD 100,000 fee might be triggered if employees travelled abroad, potentially disrupting business operations and workforce planning.

The guidance follows a lawsuit filed by the US Chamber of Commerce, which described the fee as a "misguided policy" that could hamper American innovation and competitiveness. The US issues up to 85,000 H1B visas annually under a Congressional cap, including 20,000 for holders of advanced US degrees. The USCIS clarification aims to provide clarity and stability for employers and skilled foreign professionals while the legal challenge to the proclamation continues, ensuring ongoing access to critical talent for US businesses and technology sectors. *—PTI*

HAPPY DEEPAVALI

On the occasion of Deepavali, our office will remain closed on 22 October, 2025. Hence, there will be no edition of the Salar Digital English Daily dated 23 October, 2025.

Delhi chokes after Deepavali

An anti-smog gun sprays water droplets to curb air pollution, with India Gate visible in the backdrop, as air quality deteriorates in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*

Air quality plunges to 4-yr low as thick smog smothers capital after SC lifts cracker ban

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Delhi's air quality plummeted to hazardous levels on Tuesday following widespread violation of the Supreme Court-mandated firecracker ban during Deepavali. The capital recorded its worst post-Diwali pollution since 2021, with PM2.5 levels reaching 488 micrograms per cubic metre — over three times the pre-festival level of 156.6.

According to a Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) analysis, this spike marks the most toxic Diwali period in five years. Climate Trends attributed the surge to rampant firecracker use, low wind speeds, and temperature inversion trapping pollutants near the surface. Despite the use of "green" crackers, experts say these still contribute significantly to particulate matter.

"Even green firecrackers added to PM2.5 build-up. Low wind speeds left no room for dispersion," said Prof SK Dhaka of Delhi University.

The thick haze reduced visibility and pushed Delhi's AQI into the 'severe' category, reflecting longstanding enforcement and public compliance failures. Environmentalists noted widespread violations of the 8–10 pm cracker-bursting window.

Visuals from across the national capital captured a thick layer of smog as many on social media pointed out how crackers had contributed to the situation.

Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa blamed Punjab's stubble burning for Delhi's air crisis, accusing the AAP-led government of negligence.

Meanwhile, air quality in neighbouring Haryana also deteriorated sharply. Bahadurgarh recorded an AQI of 358, followed by Jind (350), Gurugram (up to 348), and Rohtak (343). Punjab cities like Ludhiana (268), Jalandhar (242), and Amritsar (212) also reported 'poor' air quality.

The capital's air routinely enters the 'severe' category after Deepavali due to a toxic mix of cracker emissions, vehicle exhaust, stubble smoke and winter weather patterns. With the withdrawal of monsoon winds, pollution tends to linger, severely impacting respiratory health. Despite repeated advisories and firecracker bans, Delhi's air crisis continues unabated each festive season, underlining the need for stricter enforcement and public awareness. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

Over 350
get burn wounds in Delhi, Jaipur on Deepavali night.

Properties worth **Rs 1.4 cr** gutted in Shimla.

'SC chose right to burn crackers over right to life'

Amitabh Kant, India's G20 Sherpa and former NITI Aayog CEO, has sharply criticised Delhi's post-Deepavali air crisis, calling the capital's air quality "in shambles" and warning of a looming "health and environmental catastrophe". Kant blamed the Supreme Court for prioritising the "right to burn crackers over the right to live and breathe", after it allowed green crackers for Deepavali within limited time slots. However, widespread violations saw firecrackers bursting past midnight across Delhi-NCR. Kant called for a unified, ruthless action plan: ending stubble burning, modernising power plants and kilns, electrifying transport. Beijing, Los Angeles, and London did it. Why can't Delhi?" he asked.

DEEPAVALI TRUCE?

Shaw ends feud, meets CM & DKS after face-off over bad roads

BENGALURU, 21 OCT

Biocon chief Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw met Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Tuesday to extend Diwali greetings and pledge the biotechnology industry's support for Bengaluru's development.

The meeting comes after months of public criticism from Mazumdar-Shaw and other industry veterans, including former Infosys CFO Mohandas Pai, who have repeatedly highlighted the city's deteriorating infrastructure, pothole-ridden roads, and severe traffic congestion through social media, urging the state government to take urgent action.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Shivakumar, who also oversees Bengaluru Development, confirmed that Mazumdar-Shaw had assured full cooperation from the industry. "They have agreed that they are going to cooperate with the development of Bengaluru and they will not hurt Bengaluru. They will support the system," he said.

The Deputy CM outlined plans to visit areas adjacent to the Greater Bengaluru Authority this week and convene a meeting to address significant disparities in taxes and infrastructure development compared with the main Bengaluru Corporation. He also indicated that separate discussions would be held with IT and biotechnology sector leaders to secure their active backing in city development projects.

Mazumdar-Shaw rejected claims that her criticisms were politically motivated, asserting that her "agenda is clear, clean up and restore roads." Shivakumar has previously appealed to industry leaders to be patient and stop "hurting" the city, emphasising that the government is actively working to resolve infrastructure challenges while seeking the support of corporate stakeholders for long-term urban development initiatives. *—PTI*

Kiran Mazumdar Shaw visits DyCM DK Shivakumar and gives him a gift on Deepavali in Bengaluru on Tuesday *PHOTO: SALAR*

FILL ALL POTHOLES IN A WEEK, WARNS CM

People struggle to wade through a waterlogged portion of Bengaluru's KR Market area after heavy rainfall, on Tuesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

BENGALURU, 21 OCT

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday directed officials to fill all potholes in Bengaluru within a week. Speaking to officials, he cited heavy rains as the reason for previous delays and urged immediate action across the city's five corporation limits. The CM flagged off comprehensive road development projects, including white-topping work in Gandhinagar Assembly constituency, which he said could reduce potholes for 25–30 years.

Siddaramaiah also announced Rs 8,000 crore in funds for constituency development, to be allocated to both urban and rural MLAs, includinag opposition members, to ensure balanced development across Karnataka. *—PTI*

London professor deported from Delhi despite valid visa

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Francesca Orsini, a leading scholar of Hindi and professor emerita at SOAS, University of London, was deported from Delhi's IGI Airport late Monday night despite holding a valid five-year e-visa.

Orsini, author of The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940 and other acclaimed works, had travelled from Hong Kong after attending a conference in China. She planned a personal visit to India but was stopped at immigration and told she would be deported. No reason was provided at the time, she told The Wire.

Government sources later claimed Orsini violated visa conditions during a previous visit and had been blacklisted in March 2025 for allegedly engaging in research while on a tourist visa—grounds they said justified deportation.

The incident has sparked widespread condemnation from Indian academics and writers. Historian Ramachandra Guha called the deportation "the mark of a government that is insecure, paranoid, and even stupid." Historian Mukul Kesavan criticised the Modi government's "visceral hostility" to scholarship. Orsini is the fourth foreign academic denied entry in recent years, following Filippo Osella, Lindsay Bremner, and Nitasha Kaul. Scholars warn these actions reflect a growing clampdown on academic freedom in India and will have a chilling effect on global scholarly engagement with the country. *—PTI*

Niece of RG Kar accused found dead in cupboard

KOLKATA, 21 OCT

Suranjana Singh, an 11-year-old girl and niece of Sanjay Roy, the convict in the RG Kar Medical College rape-murder case, was found dead inside a cupboard at her Alipore home on Sunday evening. The girl was discovered hanging with a piece of clothing tied around her neck when her stepmother returned.

Police registered a case of unnatural death, though preliminary reports have not ruled out foul play.

Following the discovery, locals attacked the girl's parents, accusing them of routinely abusing her. *—PTI*

WORDS of WISDOM

Political stability is essential right now. Without stability, we cannot push measures for a strong economy or diplomacy

Sanae Takaichi, Japan's 1st female PM

India upgrades technical mission in Kabul to embassy

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

India has upgraded its diplomatic presence in Kabul, restoring its technical mission to the status of a full Embassy, effective immediately. The mission will be headed by a diplomat in the rank of Charge d'Affaires.

The move follows a recent meeting between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, and signals New Delhi's intent to deepen bilateral engagement with Afghanistan. India had withdrawn embassy officials after the Taliban took power in August, 2021, later deploying a "technical team" in June, 2022.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated the upgrade reinforces India's commitment to Afghanistan's development, humanitarian assistance, and capacity-building initiatives.

Despite not formally recognising the Taliban administration, India has maintained diplomatic channels. During his visit to India, Muttaqi pledged that Afghanistan's territory would not be used to threaten Indian interests and outlined plans for step-by-step improvement in bilateral ties, including sending Afghan diplomats to India. *—PTI*

CHIKKAMAGALURU HORROR

Man kills wife over dowry, hides body in well

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 21 OCT

In a case of dowry-related violence, a man from Alaghatta village in Kadur taluk allegedly murdered his wife and went to extraordinary lengths to conceal the crime. The accused, Vijay, not only dumped his wife's body in a borewell on his plantation but also staged a series of rituals to avoid suspicion and mislead investigators.

Chikkamagaluru Superintendent of Police Vikram Amte said Vijay killed his 28-year-old wife, Bharathi, around six weeks ago after she failed to bring additional dowry. He then filed a false missing complaint, claiming she was mentally unstable and had disappeared.

- The accused, Vijay performed occult rituals, fearing his wife's spirit would haunt him. He sacrificed three animals and nailed a metal plate with her photograph to a tree near a temple

Vijay allegedly performed occult rituals, fearing Bharathi's spirit would haunt him. He sacrificed three animals and nailed a metal plate with her name and photograph to a tree near a temple.

The case unravelled after police grew suspicious of inconsistencies in Vijay's version of events. "He eventually confessed during interrogation," Amte said.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Parushramappa H said that Bharathi's decomposed body was recovered from 12 feet deep inside the borewell, following a search by forensic teams.

Married for seven years, the couple had a six-year-old child. Bharathi's family claimed they had given Rs 20 lakh in dowry — including a car, motorcycle, gold, and household items — but Vijay continued to harass her for more.

The accused has been booked under Sections 103 (murder), 238 (destruction of evidence), and 230 (filing a false complaint) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

4 elephants hurt at Sakrebailu camp; probe ordered

SHIVAMOGGA, 21 OCT

Four elephants, including Balanna and Sagar, have been injured at the Sakrebailu elephant camp, prompting the State Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre to initiate a thorough investigation. Allegations of inadequate care and improper medical attention have surfaced, particularly regarding Balanna, a 35-year-old elephant that sustained injuries during the Shivamogga Dasara celebrations. "The elephant developed an infection due to negligence while being administered an IV injection," the minister noted. Reports have also indicated a shortage of veterinary doctors at the camp. Khandre stressed the importance of having a dedicated veterinary officer for each camp. —*Salar News*

Auto driver found dead near Kolar village

KOLAR, 21 OCT

In the early hours of Tuesday, an ambulance service received a call regarding a deceased individual found in an autorickshaw near Kendatti village on the Bengaluru-Chennai National Highway. Upon arrival at around 5.00am, Kolar rural police discovered the body of a 25-year-old auto driver named Afrid, a resident of Elesandra village in Bangarpet taluk. According to police sources, Afrid had been operating his auto in the Anjanapura area of the City but returned to his native village on Sunday due to slow business during the festival season. He informed family he would return to Bengaluru before leaving on Monday evening. While the motive for the murder is unclear, police suspect robbery and are investigating potential old rivalries. —*Salar News*

Infra woes because of tax chori, say BJP

A citizen forum recently wrote to the CM saying they won't pay taxes unless infra is fixed

BENGALURU, 21 OCT

In a counter to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's "vote chori" barb around Karnataka, the State BJP on Tuesday levelled "tax chori" allegation against the party-led government over the conditions of the City's infrastructure.

BJP leader R Ashoka accused the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government of "tax Chori" (tax theft) and said the City deserves action to address its infrastructure woes, not excuses and intimidation.

Ashoka, the Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly, attacked the government by highlighting a citizens forum's letter urging Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to intervene and direct the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) not to collect property tax from residents, complaining about that civic works in their locality have led to flooding and poor road conditions.

The crumbling Nagarbhavi Main Road in City; Garbage piled up on Chickpet Main Road after traders cleaned their shops and dumped the waste on the road, which authorities hadn't cleared on Tuesday **PHOTOS: MOHAMMAD ASAD**

"Mr Rahul Gandhi, Bengaluru has a new slogan: CONGRESS TAX CHOR HAI!" Ashoka said on X alleging that the government is collecting taxes, but not building roads or fixing drains. "Thanks to the apathy of CM Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar, Bengaluru citizens are fed up and demanding: Stop this tax chor!"

In a letter dated 13 Oct, addressed to the CM, the residents of the Varthur-Balagere-Panathur area, under the banner of the "Individual Tax Payers Forum" alleged that they have been suffering due to "half-measured, unscientific, and poorly coordinated" road white-topping and stormwater drainage works.

However, Siddaramaiah flagged an unfair tax devolution.

"We don't get a rupee from the Centre. Apart from Mumbai and Delhi, we pay one of the highest taxes; the people living in the City should know that out of every rupee Karnataka gives the Centre, as taxes we get back only 14-15 paisa. Is this enough?" Siddaramaiah said.

RS 58 CR TO FIX SEVERAL CITY ROADS

The government inaugurated the "White Topping and Comprehensive Road Development" project in the Gandhinagar Constituency.

Shivakumar said that the project, estimated at a cost of Rs 58.44 crore will upgrade some 5,572km of roads. These include, BT Road, Rangaswamy Temple Road, Sultanpet Main Road, Kilari Road, Hospital Road, Dhanvantri Road to Gubbi Thotadappa Road, BMTC Road, Tank Bund Road, and Race Course Road. —*Agencies*

BJP, JD(S) to form coordination panels

BENGALURU, 21 OCT

The Opposition BJP and its alliance partner JD(S) have decided to set up coordination committees at the State level and for the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) area, Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra said on Tuesday.

Vijayendra, along with a few party leaders, met JD(S) leader and Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy at his residence here to greet him on the occasion of Deepavali, and also held discussions.

"He (Kumaraswamy) too had the idea in mind to set up a coordination committee, so I sought his suggestions. With elections for five corporations under Greater Bengaluru Authority expected, we have discussed the coordination committees for Bengaluru and another for the State," he said.

State BJP President BY Vijayendra with Union Minister and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswammy on Tuesday **PHOTO: X/ @BYVIJAYENDRA**

Speaking to reporters in City, the BJP state chief said Kumaraswamy has suggested having two coordination committees and is expected to send a list of names for the committee from JD(S) in about 10 days.

"Once he (Kumaraswamy) sends, I will discussion with our party senior leaders and we will announce the coordination committee members from our side," he added.

The BJP and JD(S) struck up an alliance in 2023, and fought the 2024 Lok Sabha polls in the State together.

Pointing to the "deteriorating governance" under the Congress government, the Vijayendra said he discussed with JDS how both the parties should coordinate to tackle it, in the days ahead.

"You are seeing the disorderliness in Bengaluru every day," he said. —*PTI*

DHARMASTHALA BURIALS

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah met women activists over the Dharmasthala mass burials claims on Tuesday **PHOTO: X/ @SIDDARAMAIAH**

Enact Ugrappa report: Activists urge CM

BENGALURU, 21 OCT

A delegation of prominent women's rights activists, writers, and social leaders submitted a memorandum to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah urging him to expedite the implementation of the Ugrappa Committee report and ensure justice for victims of sexual assault and murder in Dharmasthala case.

The demand comes as the Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed by the State government is probing the alleged disappearance of women in the temple town of Dharmasthala.

The delegation, representing the "Who Are the Culprits?" movement launched in August, submitted a memorandum to Siddaramaiah.

The activists demanded that the SIT function independently and without interference, reinvestigate closed cases including those of Soujanya, Padmalatha, and Yamuna/Narayana, and probe the suspicious deaths of witnesses such as Ravi Poojary, Gopalakrishna Gowda, Dinesh Gowda, Warij Acharya, and Harish Madivala.

Other key demands included setting up an independent Gender Justice Support Group, ensuring witness protection and victim rehabilitation, and initiating criminal action against those attempting to obstruct the investigation through political or social influence.

The memorandum also urged the government to establish Internal Committees under the POSH Act in all religious institutions, and expedite both Ugrappa and Justice Verma Committee reports as part of a long-term strategy.

The 40-member delegation included noted personalities such as Arundhati Nag, Akkai Padmashali, Kavitha Lankesh, Sabiha Bhoomigowda, D Suman Kittur, Padmavati Rao, and Roopa Hasan, among others. —*PTI*

WHAT IS THE URGAPPA REPORT?

The Ugrappa Committee report, officially known as the Karnataka State Police Reforms Committee Report, was prepared under the chairmanship of former MP VS Ugrappa. The committee was constituted to examine complaints of custodial deaths, police brutality, and lapses in maintaining human rights standards within the Karnataka Police Department. The report, submitted in 2019, highlighted serious irregularities in police functioning, including instances of illegal detention, custodial torture, and corruption.

Police pay tribute to police martyrs during the Commemoration Day at CAR Grounds in Bengaluru on Tuesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ASAD**

CM credits police for curbing unethical practices

BENGALURU, 21 OCT

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said that the State's development depends on the maintenance of law and order and credited the police department for curbing unethical practices within its ranks.

Speaking at the Police Commemoration Day event after paying tributes to martyred officers, he said, "The curbing of unethical policing is a good achievement. Similarly, a brake has been put on the menace of narcotic substances, and this should be managed more effectively".

The CM said the Directorate of Civil Rights Enforcement (DCRE) police stations have been made functional to prevent atrocities against Scheduled Caste communities and emphasised that these stations must work effectively to protect constitutional rights.

Siddaramaiah also paid homage to eight police personnel from State and 191 across the country, who lost their lives in the line of duty.

He also announced: compassionate jobs sanctioned for 116 individuals, medical reimbursement for retired police being increased from Rs one lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh and the annual health check-up allowance raised from Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500. —*PTI*

Class 5 boy beaten up in school, admin booked

BENGALURU, 21 OCT

Police have registered a case against a private school here after a Class five student was allegedly beaten and confined in a room by the school authorities.

According to police, the incident took place in the school located on Sunkadakatte, Magadi Road on 14 October.

The boy's mother alleged that principal Rakesh Kumar and teacher Chandrika assaulted her son with a PVC pipe and locked him in a room till late evening on 14 October.

Police questioned the principal and later released him on bail.

Officers said he admitted to assaulting the child, reportedly over irregular attendance.

In a similar incident, a student in a traditional 'Pathashala' (school) was beaten up by a teacher for making a phone call to his grandmother.

The school at Nayakanahatti village in Chitradurga is related to a temple.

The viral video shows the teacher kicking and beating up a fifth standard boy. The teacher has been identified as Veeresh Hiremath.

The education department has started an investigation. —*PTI*

A Class 5 boy was beaten with a PVC pipe by the principal and teacher of a school on Magadi Road in City. The accused said they assaulted the minor over his attendance **PHOTO: SALAR**

DKS, Priyank dismiss 'funding Bihar' claim

BENGALURU, 21 OCT

State ministers have vehemently rejected accusations from the BJP that the ruling Congress party is fundraising for the Bihar assembly elections. BJP leaders Jagadish Shettar and BY Raghavendra alleged that State ministers are pressuring officials for contributions disguised as renewals and accused Chief Minister Siddaramaiah of hosting a cabinet dinner related to the polls. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar challenged Raghavendra to provide evidence, stating, "Where is the evidence? If there is evidence, let them show it. We don't practice it and we don't need it." He asserted that the Congress party would triumph in Bihar, as the BJP feared it. IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge meanwhile said, "The credit for dedicating State's resources to the high command belongs to the BJP, not to the Congress." —*Salar News*

NANDINI MAKES RECORD RS 46CR DURING FESTIVAL SEASON

BENGALURU, 21 OCT

The Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) reported on Tuesday that its Nandini sweets brand sold 1,100 metric tonnes, generating a turnover of Rs 46 crore during the Dasara and Deepavali festival season.

This marks a 38 per cent rise in turnover compared with last year, setting a new record for the cooperative dairy network. KMF had targeted 1,000 metric tonnes for 2025, following last year's sale of 725 metric tonnes, which brought in Rs 33.48 crore.

The federation attributed the success to meticulous pre-festival planning and coordination with its member milk unions to meet growing festive demand. "Achieving 1,100 metric tonnes of sweets, resulting in Rs 46 crore turnovers, is a proud milestone for KMF and our member unions," it said, emphasising the trust and quality that Nandini products have built over the years.

KMF procures around one crore litres of milk daily from farmers across Karnataka and sells nearly 65 lakh ltres of milk, curd, and UHT milk every day across the state and beyond. The Nandini brand offers over 175 dairy products, including ghee, butter, paneer, milk powder, sweets, and beverages, available in Karnataka, several other Indian states, and select overseas markets.

"This achievement reflects the dedication and unity of Karnataka's dairy farming community," the federation added. —*PTI*

THAT TIME OF THE YEAR

Kalaburagi markets abuzz for Deepavali festivities

KALABURAGI, 21 OCT

Kalaburagi city and district is glowing with festive spirit as residents gear up to celebrate Deepavali with grandeur. Over the past two days, major markets witnessed a massive shopping rush for new clothes, decorative items, clay lamps, sweets, and sky lanterns.

Super Market, Kanni Market, Ram Mandir Circle, Aland Naka, and Kharge Petrol Bunk Circle were packed with shoppers buying sugarcane, banana stems, pumpkins, flowers, fruits, and other items required for Lakshmi Puja. Traffic congestion persisted throughout the day as crowds thronged the Super Market area.

Kalaburagi markets like Super Market, Kanni Market, Ram Mandir Circle, Aland Naka, and Kharge Petrol Bunk Circle were packed with shoppers on Tuesday **PHOTO: SALAR**

PRICES AND OFFERINGS

Apples sold at Rs 100 for 4–5 pieces, chikoo at Rs 100 per kg, custard apples at Rs 50 for six, and bananas ranged from Rs 30–Rs 100 per dozen. Marigold flowers, priced between Rs 80–120 per kg, dominated the market, while chrysanthemums touched Rs 300 and roses Rs 400 per kg.

"Demand for marigolds is the highest as people decorate homes and vehicles," said vendor Mastan Ali Phoolwale. Pumpkins from Solapur cost Rs 60–200 each.

DECORATIONS AND POOJA ESSENTIALS

Clay lamps and imported decorative diyas in unique shapes—such as elephant motifs and five-wick designs—were in high demand.

"Diwali is our biggest festival. We bought new clothes, flowers, and pooja materials for Lakshmi Pooja. Prices are fairly reasonable this year," said local Rajkumar Jadhav. —*Salar News*

Nitish sounds poll bugle in Bihar, attacks Lalu

Eyes large chunk of women votes with monthly Rs 10,000 schemes

MUZAFFARPUR, 21 OCT

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar kicked off his Assembly election campaign on Tuesday in Meenapur constituency, targeting RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav for "doing nothing for women" during his time in office and propping up his wife Rabri Devi only after facing charges in the fodder scam.

Addressing the rally, the JD(U) President highlighted his government's initiatives for women's empowerment, including large-scale self-help groups and the recently launched Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana, which transferred Rs 10,000 each to over 1 crore women.

"Did those in power earlier care for women? Only after being forced to step down, the wife was made chief minister," said Kumar, without naming Lalu.

He also ruled out any future alliance with the RJD, calling his two previous tie-ups with the party in 2015 and 2022 short-lived and disappointing.

Later, however, Nitish drew attention for an awkward moment when he garlanded BJP candidate Rama Nishad, a woman, in public, a gesture seen as inappropriate in local tradition. His close aide Sanjay Kumar Jha attempted to stop him, but Nitish waved him off, saying, "You are a strange man," before placing the garland around Nishad's neck. Tejashwi Yadav, leader of the opposition and RJD's chief ministerial face, shared the video on X, questioning Nitish's mental health: "He is a strange man indeed. If he is in sound mental health, why is he reading from a written speech and indulging in such behaviour?" Nitish also praised the Modi government's support for Bihar's infrastructure and claimed communal tensions have reduced under his leadership. Voting in Bihar takes place on 6 and 11 November. *—PTI*

Nitish Kumar drew attention for an awkward moment when he garlanded BJP's woman candidate Rama Nishad, a gesture seen as inappropriate by some in Bihar **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

RJD's candidate arrested after filing nomination

SASARAM, 21 OCT

RJD candidate Satendra Sah was arrested on Monday immediately after filing his nomination for the Sasaram Assembly seat, in a 2004 bank robbery case in Jharkhand's Garhwa.

According to officials, Jharkhand Police acted on a non-bailable warrant issued in 2018. Sah, though allowed to file his nomination, was taken into custody soon after. "Over 20 cases, including robbery, dacoity, and Arms Act violations, are pending against him," said police.

Sah's supporters appeared unaware of the warrant. A senior Rohtas police officer confirmed the arrest was made in accordance with legal procedure. This is the third such incident involving INDIA bloc candidates in the ongoing Bihar polls.

CPI(ML) Liberation candidates Jitendra Paswan (Bhore) and Satyadeo Ram (Darauli) were also arrested shortly after filing their nominations. "These arrests reveal the panic among NDA leaders facing public anger over failed governance," the party said. *—PTI*

BJP forced 3 Jan Suraaj party candidates to withdraw: Prashant

PATNA, 21 OCT

Jan Suraaj Party Chief Prashant Kishor on Tuesday alleged that three of his party's candidates were forced to withdraw from the Bihar Assembly elections under pressure from BJP.

Addressing the media, Kishor claimed BJP was using threats and coercion to engineer unopposed wins for NDA candidates, accusing it of "murdering democracy" and urging the Election Commission to intervene.

Kishor named the withdrawn candidates as Satyaprakash Tiwari (Brahampur), Shashi Shekhar Sinha (Gopalganj), and Akhilesh Shah alias Mutur Shah (Danapur). He alleged BJP leaders, including Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, pressured Tiwari to withdraw, claiming a meeting took place just a day before the withdrawal deadline. He further accused BJP of ensuring victory for LJP (RV)'s Hulas Pandey, a strongman contesting from Brahampur.

In Gopalganj, Kishor said BJP leaders allegedly coerced Sinha into withdrawing. In Danapur, he claimed the BJP circulated false rumours that Jan Suraaj candidate Akhilesh Shah had been abducted by RJD's Ritlal Yadav, while he was actually with Amit Shah and Pradhan. "The BJP is scared of honest professionals — doctors, educators, activists — contesting against them," Kishor said. "If the EC cannot protect candidates, how can it protect voters?" *—PTI*

Jan Suraaj chief Prashant Kishor showed a photo of Satyaprakash Tiwari with BJP's Minister Dharmendra Pradhan **PHOTO: PTI**

Cash, liquor worth over Rs 71 cr seized in Bihar

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Enforcement agencies have seized cash, drugs, liquor and precious metals worth over Rs 71 crore in Bihar since the announcement of the assembly polls, the Election Commission said on Tuesday. Bihar has been a dry state since 2016, when alcohol was banned. The poll panel said that 824 flying squads have been deployed across Bihar to ensure that the complaints are attended to within 100 minutes. Citizens and political parties can also report model code violations using the C-Vigil mobile application or ECINET digital platform. *—PTI*

VIP to move HC over RJD leader's candidature

PATNA, 21 OCT

VIP president Santosh Sahani said he will move the Patna High Court against Darbhanga's Gaura Bauram election officials for not cancelling RJD rebel Afzal Ali Khan's nomination, despite party chief Lalu Prasad requesting its withdrawal. Khan refused to step down after the seat was allotted to VIP under the Mahagathbandhan alliance. Sahani, VIP's official candidate and brother of founder Mukesh Sahani, alleged deliberate inaction by officials. With Khan retaining the RJD's 'lantern' symbol, Mahagathbandhan faces a split in votes. The seat will go to polls on 6 November. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Aus to import unpeeled prawns from Andhra

AMARAVATI, 21 OCT

Andhra Pradesh IT Minister Nara Lokesh announced that Australia has granted its first import approval for unpeeled Indian prawns, following years of restrictions linked to white spot virus detections. During his visit to Australia, Lokesh met with government officials and seafood trade leaders to explore new market opportunities for Indian aquaculture exports. He stated, "A long-standing hurdle for Indian seafood exporters has been Australia's restrictions on unpeeled prawns... Today, the first import approval for Indian prawns has been granted." The approval is expected to enhance trade, boost exporter confidence, and open new avenues for the coastal Andhra prawn economy. *—PTI*

DIVIDED BY POLITICS

3 'Agas' lock horns for Budgam bypoll

BUDGAM, 21 OCT

The Budgam assembly bypoll in central Kashmir has escalated into a fiercely personal political contest among three prominent members of the Shia community. The seat was vacated by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah after he opted to retain Ganderbal following the 2024 elections.

The contest featured National Conference's **Aga Syed Mehmood**, former minister; Peoples Democratic Party's Aga Syed Muntazir Mehdi; and BJP's Aga Syed Mohsin. Mehmood dismissed critiques of the NC's first-year performance, stating, "Demanding results of five years in 12 months is unfair," and lauded Omar Abdullah's dedication as "unparalleled." He remarked on his familial relation to Mehdi, saying, "Though we share a family bond, we belong to two different parties."

Mehdi has positioned his campaign against the NC's alleged abandonment of the Budgam populace. He accused Abdullah of betraying voters, asserting, "People are going to put a full stop to this practice this time." He stressed that the election is an issue-centric fight, highlighting local problems like water contamination and poor infrastructure.

BJP candidate Mohsin is banking on anti-incumbency sentiments against both the NC and PDP, contending, "People don't care about Article 370 or statehood; they want development and jobs."

As of now, 20 candidates have filed nominations for the Budgam bypoll, scheduled for 11 November. In the last assembly elections, Abdullah secured 36,010 votes, leading Mehdi who garnered 17,525. *—PTI*

yed Muntazir Mehdi **PHOTO: ANI**

- Mehdi has positioned his campaign against the NC's alleged abandonment of the Budgam populace. He accused Abdullah of betraying voters, asserting, "People are going to put a full stop to this practice this time."

AIMIM backs Cong in Jubilee Hills bypoll

HYDERABAD, 21 OCT

AIMIM Chief Asaduddin Owaisi on Tuesday announced his party's support for Congress candidate Naveen Yadav in the Jubilee Hills Assembly bypoll, set for 11 November.

Owaisi urged voters to back Yadav, citing BRS's decadelong failure to develop the constituency. He said the bypoll result won't impact the state government and hinted at a new strategy for the upcoming general elections. The seat fell vacant following the death of BRS MLA Maganti Gopinath in June.

BRS has fielded his widow, Maganti Sunitha, while the BJP nominated Lankala Deepak Reddy. Reddy filed his nomination on Tuesday. *—PTI*

Rajnath warns against 'ideological wars'

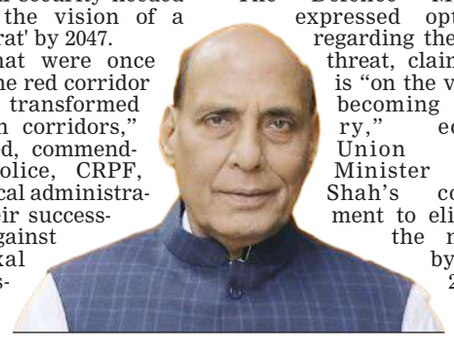
NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has warned of the evolving security challenges facing India, emphasising increasing "ideological wars", sophisticated crimes, and terrorism on the rise within society. Speaking at Police Commemoration Day, Singh highlighted the essential balance between external and internal security needed to realise the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

"Areas that were once known as the red corridor have now transformed into growth corridors," Singh stated, commending the police, CRPF, BSF, and local administration for their successful efforts against the Naxal issue, historically a major internal security concern.

He noted that despite the progress, the nature of crime has changed, becoming "more organised, invisible, and complex," with the intent to create societal chaos and challenge national stability. "If people are sleeping peacefully today, it is due to their confidence in our vigilant armed forces and alert police," Singh added.

The Defence Minister expressed optimism regarding the Naxal threat, claiming it is "on the verge of becoming history," echoing Union Home Minister Amit Shah's commitment to eliminate the menace by March 2026. *—PTI*



On Deepavali, PM hails Op Sindoor in letter to nation

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday penned a letter to the citizens on Deepavali, highlighting Operation Sindoor and the government's achievements while asserting that India has become a symbol of stability in a world full of crises. Modi said Operation Sindoor reflected the spirit of righteousness and justice, stating, "Bharat not only upheld righteousness but also avenged injustice." He described the festival as the second Deepavali after the Ram Temple's construction in Ayodhya, adding that Lord Ram's teachings inspire courage and morality.

Modi noted that this Deepavali was special as lamps would be lit in districts once plagued by Naxalism, marking peace and progress. He said many former extremists had "abandoned violence and joined the mainstream of development," calling it a major national achievement. The prime minister also highlighted the reduction in GST rates and the ongoing 'GST Bachat Utsav' (Savings Festival), saying it had helped citizens save thousands of crores. Urging people to embrace swadeshi products, respect all languages, prioritise health and practise yoga, Modi said, "All these efforts will rapidly take us towards a Viksit Bharat." *—PTI*

HC asks Google to remove 'misleading' info against Sadhguru

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

The Delhi High Court has directed Google LLC to make an earnest effort to remove misleading or deepfake content infringing the personality rights of Isha Foundation founder Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, and to ensure that identical or similar material is automatically detected and taken down using its technology.

The court also asked Google and representatives of Sadhguru to hold a joint meeting to specifically identify content that falls outside the scope of Google's advertising and moderation policies.

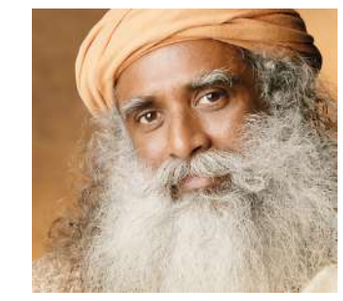
The direction followed the company's submission that it was willing to adopt a collaborative approach with the plaintiff to address such concerns and remove objectionable material flagged to it.

In its 14 October order, the bench said Google "must make an endeavour to ensure that identical or similar content is removed through its technology so as to obviate the plaintiff's onus of identifying such URLs and approaching the company for each take-down."

The court added that if the company faced any technological limitations, it could seek instructions and file an affidavit explaining them.

Counsel for Sadhguru argued that under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, Google should deploy proactive tools to automatically identify identical content to avoid repeated complaints.

Earlier, Sadhguru and Isha Foundation had petitioned the court seeking protection of his personality rights and removal of fake and misleading videos, posts, and advertisements. *—PTI*



Cong flays BJP over Don's claim on Russian oil

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Congress hit out at the Modi government after US President Donald Trump again claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had assured him India would stop importing oil from Russia, on Tuesday. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said Trump has raised the issue three times in five days and "brushed aside" the Ministry of External Affairs' (MEA) denials of any such conversation. "President Trump says he spoke to his good friend Mr Modi and India promised to stop these imports. The MEA says it is unaware of such conversations, but Trump has clearly brushed aside the denial," Ramesh said.

Trump, speaking aboard Air Force One, warned that India would face "massive tariffs" if it continued to buy Russian oil. The MEA had earlier clarified that India's energy sourcing is guided by market conditions and consumer interests. The Congress accused Modi of remaining silent on Trump's repeated claims and said the government's foreign policy had "collapsed," urging it to brief opposition leaders on the situation. *–PTI*

Rights panel takes cognisance of T'gana encounter

HYDERABAD, 21 OCT

The Telangana State Human Rights Commission (TSHRC) has issued a notice to the Director General of Police, seeking a detailed report on the death of an accused shot by police after allegedly stabbing a constable in Nizamabad district. The commission took cognisance of news reports that Shaik Riyaz, 24, was killed on Monday when he reportedly tried to snatch a policeman's pistol and attack officers at a government hospital. Riyaz had earlier stabbed constable Pramod (in his mid-40s) in the chest while being taken on a two-wheeler. The TSHRC directed the DGP to submit a factual report by 24 November, including details of any magisterial or judicial inquiry, compliance with Supreme Court and NHRC guidelines on encounter deaths. *—PTI*

3 BOOKED FOR PRAYERS IN PUNE

BJP 'purifies' fort with cow urine after namaz

PUNE, 21 OCT

A case has been registered against three unidentified women after a video showing them offering namaz inside Pune's historic Shaniwar Wada went viral, sparking protests from BJP MP Medha Kulkarni and right-wing groups.

The incident reportedly took place around 1.45 pm on Saturday. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) lodged a complaint, and Pune Police later booked the women under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Rules, 1959, which prohibit religious activities at protected monuments.

The FIR came after Kulkarni amplified the video on X, calling for protests. BJP workers, led by her, held demonstrations at the site and performed a "purification ritual" by sprinkling cow urine and dung at the spot.

"Shaniwar Wada is a historic symbol of our heritage. If namaz is performed here today, it may lead to religious encroachment tomorrow," Kulkarni said.

Tensions escalated when some protesters targeted the nearby Hazrat Khwaja Sayyed Dargah, demanding its removal. Police had to use mild force to disperse the crowd after clashes broke out.

BJP MP Medha Kulkarni uses cow urine to clean the spot where three women offered namaz in Pune's Shaniwar Wada **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

- Tensions escalated when some protesters targeted the nearby Hazrat Khwaja Sayyed Dargah, demanding its removal. Police had to use mild force to disperse the crowd.

Maharashtra Minister Nitesh Rane backed the protests, questioning whether Muslims would accept Hindus chanting Hanuman Chalisa at Haji Ali. "Prayers must be offered only at designated places," he said.

Shaniwar Wada, built in 1732, was the seat of the Maratha Empire and is a protected monument under ASI. Officials confirmed that the women involved were asked to leave soon after the incident. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: PTI

Sabarimala: SIT submits report to HC in sealed cover

KOCHI, 21 OCT

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged loss of gold from Sabarimala Temple has submitted its first progress report to the Kerala High Court in a sealed cover. The report was presented before a bench of Justices Raja Vijayaraghavan and KV Jayakumar during closed-door proceedings. The SIT was tasked with investigating after a vigilance report highlighted lapses following the removal of gold-plated copper claddings from the Dwarapalaka idols for repair without notifying the court. Two cases have been registered, with ten people named, including Travancore Devaswom Board officials and Bengaluru-based sponsor Unnikrishnan Potty, who has been arrested. The report details the current status of the probe, with HC monitoring progress. *—PTI*

UP youth killed in dispute over firecracker

MAU, 21 OCT

A 19-year-old youth, Ajay Chauhan, was killed and his cousin, Radheshyam Chauhan, 19, critically injured in Mau district, Uttar Pradesh, following a dispute over bursting firecrackers. The incident occurred late Monday in Katihari village near a pandal housing idols of Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Ganesha. Police said a verbal argument erupted between Ajay's group and another led by Samarjeet Chauhan, who objected to the firecrackers. The confrontation quickly escalated into a violent clash involving sticks and sharp objects. Emergency Medical Officer Dr Zaheer Sarfaraz confirmed Ajay was brought dead, while his cousin is under critical care. Additional police restored order, and an FIR has been filed. *—PTI*

Accident victim's family gets Rs 35.27L relief

THANE, 21 OCT

The Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) in Thane, Maharashtra, has awarded Rs 35.27 lakh to the children of 58-year-old Shalan Suresh Kamble, who died after being hit by a hydraulic crane in November 2017. The accident occurred in Wagle Estate when Kamble, a peon earning Rs 38,822 per month at the Employees Provident Fund Organisation, was struck and later succumbed to her injuries. The tribunal held the crane driver solely responsible and noted there was no contributory negligence by the victim. Oriental Insurance Company must pay the compensation first but can recover it from the crane owner, as the driver did not hold a valid crane endorsement on their licence. The award carries 9 per cent interest per annum. *—PTI*

Indian medico airlifted from Russia after stroke

JAIPUR, 21 OCT

A 22-year-old MBBS student from Jaipur, Rajasthan, critically ill in Kazakhstan following a brain stroke, was airlifted to Jaipur on Monday evening. Rahul Ghosalya, a medical student in Astana since 2021, suffered a stroke on 8 October and had been on ventilator support. He was brought to SMS Hospital in Jaipur via air ambulance and admitted to the Medical ICU under the supervision of medical and district administration teams. A team led by SMS Medical College Principal Dr Deepak Maheshwari has begun his treatment, with a four-member panel overseeing his care. Rahul's parents had appealed to central and state governments for help, with social organisations supporting efforts to bring him back to India for advanced treatment. *—PTI*

Toxic heavy metals found in firecrackers, says NGO

25 firecrackers have high levels of aluminium & potassium

MUMBAI, 21 OCT

As festive fireworks lit up the night sky, toxic smoke and tragedy followed, with hazardous metals clouding the air and a residential fire in Delhi reigniting debate over the country's unchecked use of firecrackers during Diwali.

According to Mumbai-based NGO Awaaz Foundation, testing of 25 firecracker samples revealed high levels of harmful substances such as aluminium, potassium, and sulfur, all exceeding safe limits. The NGO blamed the State Government for failing to regulate the manufacture and sale of toxic firecrackers despite years of awareness drives and testing.

It added that most firecrackers lacked mandatory QR codes and noise level details, while several had misleading chemical compositions.

For instance, the label on Blueberry firecrackers stated the composition as potassium nitrate (55 per cent), aluminium (20 per cent), sulphur (15 per cent), and zeolite (10 per cent). However, laboratory analysis detected aluminium (36.571 per cent), potassium (16.851 per cent), sulfur (4.045 per cent), silicon (0.148 per cent), and oxygen (42.249 per cent).

The environmental warning came amid a fire that broke out in a four-storey residential building in west Delhi's Mohan Garden area on Diwali night, allegedly triggered by firecrackers. Seven residents, including three children, were rescued safely, officials said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Ankit Singh confirmed that local police and the fire brigade worked together to rescue the trapped families.

The incident underscored growing concerns over public safety and air pollution from unregulated firecracker use during Diwali. *—PTI*

People light firecrackers as part of Diwali festival celebrations, in Kolkata, Monday night *PHOTO: PTI*

> **Their (AAP) 11-year tenure has just ended. We have been repeatedly saying that it will take us 2-2.5 years to bring Delhi to a health-friendly and breathable condition. Despite that, the same people who polluted Delhi make such statements, and it makes me laugh**
>
> -Manoj Tiwari, BJP MP

Delhiites flag concern over rule violations in sales

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Firecracker sales in Delhi surged this Diwali, with traders reporting record demand despite concerns over pollution and time-limit violations. CTI Chairman Brijesh Goyal said most shops sold out a day before Diwali, forcing buyers to nearby NCR cities, and pegged total sales at around Rs 500 crore. Sadar Bazar Association president Paramjit Singh Pamma said sales rose nearly 40 per cent from last year, with strong demand for lights and decorations too. The Supreme Court had permitted limited sale and use of green firecrackers between October 18–21 and specific hours on Diwali, but Resident Welfare Associations alleged widespread violations. B.S. Vohra said crackers were burst till 3 am, while Atul Goyal (URJA) urged stricter enforcement to balance festivities with public health. *—PTI*

1ST IN INDIA

Kerala govt to start 3-shift system for all private hospitals

T'PURAM, 21 OCT

The Kerala government has issued a landmark order mandating a unified 6.5-hour (6-6-12) shift system for all categories of employees, including nurses, in all private hospitals across the state, regardless of bed strength.

The new Labour Department directive, dated 18 October, replaces the earlier rule that applied only to hospitals with over 100 beds.

It standardises working hours across the private healthcare sector, introducing three shifts: two-day shifts of six hours each and a 12-hour night shift.

The move is expected to significantly improve working conditions for hundreds of healthcare workers.

Employees working beyond their shift hours are now entitled to overtime pay, applicable for work exceeding eight hours per day, 48 hours per week, or 208 hours per month.

This decision follows recommendations by the V Veerakumar Committee, formed in 2012 after a nurses' strike, to improve labour standards and ensure fair scheduling. The committee, chaired by former Joint Labour Commissioner V Veerakumar, pushed for a standardised three-shift duty system across all private hospitals.

The order also amends a 2021 directive that applied only to private hospitals with over 100 beds, now extending its benefits to all private hospital employees.

It also calls for the provision of restrooms for staff who cannot return home due to lack of transport after night shifts.

The Department of Employment and Skills shared the order with media on Tuesday, terming it a major step toward uniformity and fairness in private healthcare employment practices. *—PTI*

'Jammu carries out 100 anti-terror ops daily'

JAMMU, 21 OCT

Over 100 anti-terror operations are being carried out daily in Jammu division, with security forces intensifying efforts to neutralise foreign terrorists hiding in dense forest areas, Inspector General of Police (Jammu Zone), Bhim Sen Tuti, said on Tuesday.

Speaking after the Police Commemoration Day ceremony in Jammu, Tuti said foreign terrorists have posed a major challenge over the past two years. "We are strengthening our counter-terror and border protection grid. We hope to neutralise them soon," he stated.

The day honours 10 CRPF personnel martyred on 21 October, 1959, in an ambush by Chinese troops in Ladakh.

Tuti emphasised that policing today is data-driven and evidence-based. "We conduct around 120 counter-terror operations daily, both speculative and intelligence-based. Terrorism remains a key concern, but we also remember officers martyred while on traffic or criminal duty," he said, paying tribute to fallen personnel.

He acknowledged terrorists' use of drones and evolving technology, but affirmed that security forces remain "two steps ahead" with countermeasures in place. He reassured the public that J&K Police will ensure their safety.

Earlier, a blood donation camp saw 125 police personnel participate. Commemorative events were held across all ten Jammu districts, with families of martyrs and civil society members in attendance. *—PTI*

Bhim Sen Tuti *PHOTO: ANI*

- The day honours 10 CRPF personnel martyred on 21 October, 1959, in an ambush by Chinese troops in Ladakh.

Heavy rains lash Tamil Nadu, red alert in 8 districts

CHENNAI/AMARAVATI, 21 OCT

Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh are bracing for intense rainfall as the northeast monsoon intensifies and a low-pressure area form over the southwest Bay of Bengal.

In Tamil Nadu, the Regional Meteorological Centre issued a red alert for eight districts — Villupuram, Cuddalore, Mayiladuthurai, Naga pattinam, Tiruvallur, Thanjavur, Pudukottai and Ramanathapuram — and an orange alert for Chennai and surrounding regions. Puducherry is also under red alert.

Chief Minister MK Stalin reviewed the situation with district collectors via video conference and instructed officials to keep relief camps ready and ensure food, water and medical supplies. Teams have been asked to prepare with equipment.

Deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin inspected flood-mitigation infrastructure in south Chennai, including Rs 27 crore works on the Okkiam Madhavi canal and desilting at Kannagi Nagar. In Tirunelveli, farmers reported crop damage, leaving no time for harvesting.

Meanwhile in Andhra Pradesh, the Met Department reported a low-pressure system developing early Tuesday over the southwest Bay, expected to intensify into a depression in 36 hours. Heavy to very heavy rains are forecast from 21–23 October in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema, with gusty winds up to 55 kmph. *—PTI*

Women walk with an umbrella on a road during heavy rainfall, in Chennai *PHOTO: PTI*

Gujarat: ₹947 cr aid rolled out for farmers

AHMEDABAD, 21 OCT

The Gujarat government has announced Rs 947 crore relief package for farmers in five districts for crop damage due to heavy rains during August and September.

Assistance of Rs 563 crore will be provided as per provisions of SDRF, while Rs 384 crore has been added from the state budget, totalling Rs 947 crore, the Agriculture Minister **Jitu Vaghani** said.

The assistance will be paid to affected farmers from 800 villages in 18 talukas of Junagadh, Panchmahal, Kutch, Patan and Vav-Tharad districts, a government release said.

The Minister said that due to special geographical conditions in low-lying areas of Vav-Tharad and Patan districts, heavy rains cause frequent flooding of cultivable land for a long time.

"For the first time, a provision of Rs 2,500 crore will be made separately to solve the problems of the affected farmers of this area. If more is needed, a provision of Rs 5,000 crore or more will also be made," the Agriculture Minister said. *—PTI*

Punjab ex-DGP and wife booked for alleged murder of son

CHANDIGARH, 21 OCT

Former Punjab DGP Mohammad Mustafa and his wife Razia Sultana, a former state minister, have been booked for the alleged murder of their son, Akil Akhter, an advocate who was found dead under suspicious circumstances at his Panchkula residence on 16 October.

The FIR was registered on October 20 following a complaint by Shamshuddin, a family acquaintance, who alleged foul play and cited a purported video recorded by Akhter in August. The video contained serious allegations against his father, wife, and sister, all of whom are now named in the FIR under Sections 103(1) (murder) and 61 (criminal conspiracy) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

According to Panchkula DCP Srishti Gupta, the family initially claimed Akhter was found dead in his room. No foul play was suspected at the time, and his body was handed over after a post-mortem.

However, Shamshuddin's complaint pointed to a video where Akhter claimed he was under mental trauma, feared for his life, and alleged attempts to falsely implicate or harm him. He also said the family was trying to portray him as delusional.

In a later video, Akhter retracted his earlier claims, calling it a result of mental illness. Despite the conflicting statements, the complaint insisted that the initial video warrants a thorough probe.

Police have now formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to conduct a "scientific and impartial" investigation. The Panchkula Police assured that no guilty will be spared and no innocent person harmed, reaffirming their commitment to transparency and justice. *—PTI*

Akil Akhter; Mohammad Mustafa; Razia Sultana *PHOTO: PTI*

- According to Police, the family initially claimed Akhter was found dead in his room. No foul play was suspected at the time, and his body was handed over after a post-mortem.

VARSITY RESEARCH

Nagaland finds remedy for diabetic wounds

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Researchers at Nagaland University have identified Sinapic acid, a naturally occurring plant compound, as a promising oral therapy for accelerating wound healing in diabetic patients.

The study, led by Dr Panav Kumar Prabhakar, Head of the Department of Biotechnology, is the first globally to demonstrate that Sinapic acid can speed up wound repair in diabetic conditions by activating the SIRT1 pathway, a key regulator of tissue repair, angiogenesis, and inflammation.

Published in Nature Scientific Reports, a peer-reviewed journal under the Nature Portfolio, the research offers hope for a safe, natural, and affordable alternative to existing synthetic drugs, which often come with limited efficacy and adverse side effects.

Vice Chancellor Jagadish K Patnaik praised the discovery, calling it a reflection of the university's commitment to addressing critical healthcare challenges through innovation rooted in nature.

Dr Prabhakar noted that diabetic wounds, particularly foot ulcers, are a major global concern and can lead to infection and even amputation. "Our aim was to find a plant-based solution. Sinapic acid, found in various edible plants, promotes tissue repair, reduces inflammation, and aids blood vessel formation," he said.

Interestingly, a lower dose (20 mg/kg) proved more effective than a higher one, due to an "Inverted Dose-Response" phenomenon — an insight with important implications for future clinical use, especially in resource-limited settings. *—PTI*

The research offers hope for a safe, natural, and affordable alternative to existing synthetic drugs *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

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Anti-corruption watchdog wants seven BMW cars

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

The anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal of India has floated a tender to procure seven BMW 3 Series 330Li M Sport cars, collectively worth around Rs 5 crore, for its chairman and six members.

According to the tender, the luxury sedans must be long-wheelbase models in white. Each vehicle, priced at approximately Rs 69.5 lakh on-road in Delhi, is known for its spacious interiors, advanced technology, and premium comfort.

The tender also mandates a seven-day comprehensive training programme for Lokpal drivers and designated staff. This includes classroom sessions and on-road practical training, covering familiarisation with controls, safety systems, emergency handling, fuel efficiency techniques, and infotainment features. Each driver must complete at least 50km of supervised on-road training, extendable up to 100km if necessary.

The training will take place at the Lokpal premises in Vasant Kunj or another mutually agreed location. All expenses, including trainers, vehicles, fuel, materials, refreshments, and logistics — must be covered by the vendor. Bidders must submit Rs 10 lakh as earnest money. The deadline is 6 November, with opening scheduled the next day. Delivery of the cars is expected within 14 to 30 days from the supply order date. *—PTI*

DEEPAVALI CELEBRATION AFTERMATH

After Monday's grand Deepavali celebration, a municipal worker sweeps the street littered with firecrackers and garbage in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Tuesday
PHOTO: PTI

Bihar's youth want govt prioritising education, jobs

College students in poll-bound Bihar, many of whom are first-time voters, rue the lack of job opportunities that has been forcing several of their seniors to leave the state in search of work, and want a government that can strengthen the education system and generate employment.

They also expressed frustration over irregular government job postings, often marred by paper leaks and delayed exam schedules.

As the state goes to assembly polls in two phases on 6 and 11 November, around 14 lakh youth are expected to vote for the first time, according to the data released by the Election Commission. Voters in the age group 18-29, totalling 1.63 crore, reportedly constitute an estimated 22-25 per cent of the state's electorate.

"Our hopes from the present government have faded completely," said Abhinav Kumar Shukla, a postgraduate student in the Hindi Department of Patna University.

Shukla, who hails from Bhabhua town in Kaimur district, believes that there is a need for "widespread employment generation within the state".

Santosh Kumar, a visually challenged student of Patna College who hails from Jamui district, said, "Patna University's present must match its past. Its alumni are par excellence but its present state is below par."

A constituent of Patna University, Patna College, once called 'Oxford of the East', now appears to be sparsely occupied, with untrimmed grasses on the ground and near-empty corridors.

Patna University had been a hotbed of political activism, producing renowned intellectuals, thinkers and litterateurs, among others.

It has produced political leaders from Lalu Prasad Yadav and Nitish Kumar to JP Nadda. The political sharpness still runs in the veins of the students studying in the university.

As the state goes to assembly polls in two phases on 6 and 11 November, around 14 lakh youth are expected to vote for the first time, according to the data released by the Election Commission ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

On the question of central university status for Patna University, Santosh said, "The condition of central universities is no better, but we will definitely root for that status for our university."

Ravindra Kumar Singh, who hails from Kaimur district, is a student of Shakuntala Misra National Rehabilitation University (SMNRU) in Lucknow, but currently stays in a hostel dedicated to visually impaired students in Patna University.

He said, "Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, is not being implemented on the ground in Bihar. I will vote for a party that will prioritise education. The likelihood of better implementation of the Act under its rule will be more."

Prashant Kishor's claim that "Bihar's youth won't have to go outside the state for work" if his party is voted to power seems to have struck a chord with some students.

Mehzabin Firdaus, a first-year BA student in the Urdu Department of Patna College, will cast her maiden vote in the upcoming elections.

Gaurav Kumar, a postgraduate student in Psychology Department, who will vote for the second time in this election, believes that "health and education sectors are in dismal state" and "corruption is rampant".

Migration, he said, is another big issue in Bihar.

On Prashant Kishor, he said, "At least he is speaking on things that matter, making practical poll promises, and his candidates are clean."

However, he admitted, "the chances of his party's victory are slim".

On the cricket ground in Patna Science College, DK Pratap from Bettiah believes that "the NDA government has failed utterly on the fronts of education, employment, and out-migration control".

He is banking on the INDIA bloc to solve the problems of Bihar.

Dhruv Kumar, an undergraduate student in the Geography Department of Patna College, sounded frustrated as he said, "I had come to this college with big hopes. Except for a few professors, the teaching technique of most of them is obsolete."

He said his voting decision would rest on the comparative assessment of the quality of candidates in his region.

Another Patna College student from Purnea, who refused to reveal his name, said that the "implementation of the New Education Policy is shoddy on the ground".

He wishes to see the emergence of a young leader with new thinking "who can understand the nuances of present-day education requirements".

Anshali Pathak, hailing from Saran, emphasised the strengthening of the basics of education and fostering civic sense and discipline, which, she believes, "is possible only through the combined efforts of a suitable government and citizens". *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

Ukraine braces for another winter without power

As the lights went out in her hometown, 40-year-old Zinaida Kot could not help but think about her next dialysis treatment for kidney disease. Without electricity, the machine that keeps her alive stops working.

Kot is among millions of Ukrainians who are bracing for another winter of power cuts and possibly blackouts as Russia renewed its campaign of attacks on the country's energy grid.

In some regions — mostly those closer to the front line in the east — the season of buzzing generators has started, as well as long hours of darkness with no power or water.

The attacks have grown more effective as Russia launches hundreds of drones, some equipped with cameras that improve targeting, overwhelming air defences — especially in regions where protection is weaker.

The consequences are already reshaping daily life — especially for those whose survival depends on electricity. For Zinaida Kot, who has been on dialysis for seven years, this is far worse than mere discomfort.

BLACKOUT IN SHOSTKA

In early October, a Russian strike left the small northern town of Shostka — with a prewar population of nearly 72,000 — without electricity, water, or gas. The town lies just 50km from the front line in northern Sumy region. Gas service was later restored, and electricity returned for only a few hours each day.

"The situation is challenging," said Mykola Noha, the mayor of Shostka. Electricity and water are now supplied on a schedule, available for a few hours each day. "And it really worries the residents as we can't predict power cuts. We fix something, and it gets destroyed again. This is our situation."

Shostka hums with the low growl of generators on rain-dark asphalt, blanketed in yellow leaves. They power cafes, shops, residential buildings, and hospitals. Across town, so-called "invincibility points" offer residents a place to charge devices, warm up, and even rest on cots provided.

At the local hospital, where all stoves are electric, staff built a simple wood-burning oven during the early days of Russia's invasion in 2022, when the town came close to occupation. And now it helps to feed at least 180 patients, said Svitlana Zakotei, 57, a nurse who oversees the patients' meals.

The hospital has spent three weeks running on generators — a costly lifeline that burns half a ton of fuel a day, about 250,000 hryvnias (USD 5,973) a week, said the hospital's chief, Oleh Shtohryn. That's nearly as much as its usual monthly electricity bill.

RUSSIA HAS A NEW STRATEGY

The crisis in Shostka reflects Russia's shifting strategy.

In 2022–2023, Moscow launched waves of missiles and drones across the country to destabilise Ukraine's national grid. This year, it is striking region by region.

The recent pattern shows heavier attacks on the Chernihiv, Sumy, and Poltava regions, while Kharkiv, Odesa, Mykolaiv, and Dnipro face less frequent but still regular strikes.

Front-line regions within about 120kms of combat are the most vulnerable, he said.

And for Ukrainian energy crews, that means fixing the same lines and stations again and again — from transmission towers to thermal plants — while enduring outages at home.

"But it's our job. Who else would do it? Nobody else would," said Bohdan Bilous, an electrical technician. "I want to be optimistic and prepared for any situation, but the reality is extremely cruel right now."

Svitlana Kalysh, spokeswoman for the regional energy company in Sumy region, said proximity to the front line makes each repair crew a target.

BRACING FOR THE UPCOMING WINTER

At a switchyard in the Chernihiv region, all seems calm — a woman tends her cabbage patch nearby — but residents are used to the explosions which intensify each year as winter nears.

The switchyard looks like a museum of nearly four years of strikes. Along the main road lined with towering pylons, a crater in the asphalt marks one of the first attacks in 2022.

The latest strike, on 4 October, was far more precise and devastating. In the roof of the transformer building, there's one neat hole near the centre, and another in the wall — scars left by Shahed drones.

Sandbags around the building absorbed some shock waves but couldn't stop a direct hit. Inside, the station is cold and dark but still operating at half capacity.

Thousands of homes across Chernihiv remain without steady power.

Kharchenko noted that last year Russia lacked the capacity to launch 500 or 600 drones at once, and the smaller attacks it could mount were largely ineffective.

But this year, even when several air-defence points and mobile units surround a facility, the Russians simply overwhelm them — sending about six drones at each defensive position and another 10 directly at the target. *—PTI*

In 2022–2023, Moscow launched waves of missiles and drones across the country to destabilise Ukraine's national grid ***PHOTO: GLOBAL IMAGES UKRAINE***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Govardhan Asrani: Comedian & actor who adapted through the times

He was more than just a comedian, a staple brought into the plot to invoke laughs. Govardhan Kumar Asrani was also a quiet character actor who was so much a part of the middle-of-the-road movies that now epitomise a golden era in Hindi cinema.

Asrani, who died on Deepavali afternoon and was cremated quietly on Monday evening without any fanfare as the country celebrated the festival of lights, was 84.

He will always be remembered as the jailor from "Sholay" whose loud, exaggerated persona evoked laughter and whose dialogue "Hum Angrezon ke zamane ke jailor hain" is quoted almost as if on loop 50 years later.

That same year came Basu Chatterjee's "Chhoti Si Baat" in which Asrani played the smooth talking Nagesh trying to stymie the hero Amol Palekar's chances with Vidya Sinha, and the supportive brother in Gulzar's "Khushboo".

Quite incredibly, 1975 was also the year he went against the grain to play a negative role in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's "Chaitali".

It was an incredible, if now forgotten, career arc.

Asrani acted in more than 300 films over six decades. It was a lifetime of making movies, many roles forgettable and many that will stay on.

Asrani was also famously Chander from "Abhimaan" (1973), the friend who helps the conflicted singer hero work through his ego battles. The Amitabh Bachchan-Jaya Bachchan starrer was a personal favourite, one that his mentor Mukherjee convinced him to play.

In a sense, Mukherjee groomed him into being a character artiste who represented a certain kind of cinematic sensibility. Amongst the others who gave him a platform to shine were Gulzar and Basu Chatterjee.

The films from the 1970s, considered to be a decade of Hindi movies greats, included Asrani as a lost-in-his-own world musician in "Bawarchi" (1972), the friend who has no comic lines but moves the humour plotline in the classic comedy "Chupke Chupke" (1975) and the heroine's brother in "Namak Haram" (1973).

All these were directed by Mukherjee.

Gulzar tried to explore Asrani's range as an artist, casting him in "Mere Apne", "Parichay", "Koshish" and "Achanak".

Asrani was an actor who adapted through the times. As the tone grew louder and more slapstick in the 1980s and 1990s, so did Asrani.

Govardhan Asrani died on Moday afternoon, at the age of 84 and was cremated in the evening ***PHOTO: PTI***

His chemistry with Govinda in several David Dhawan comedies such as "Hero No. 1", "Deewana Mastana" and "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan" introduced him to a new generation of viewers.

Asrani was part of a remarkable comic tradition that included Mehmood, Johnny Walker and Keshto Mukherjee. He brought his own brand of everyman humour to the screen.

In the last phase of his acting career, Asrani's most significant collaborator was Priyadarshan who gave him roles in "Hera Pheri", "Chup Chup Ke", "Garam Masala" and "Bhool Bhulaiya".

Born in 1941 into a middle-class Sindhi family that migrated from Pakistan after Partition, Asrani grew up in Jaipur with four sisters and three brothers.

He was not interested in his father's carpet business and was insistent on becoming an actor instead. He enrolled himself in Pune's famed Film and Television Institute of India (FTII).

His acting career began in the early 1960s, with small parts in Gujarati films before he moved to Mumbai.

His first Hindi film appearance was in "Hare Kaanch Ki Choodiyan" (1967), but it was Hrishikesh Mukherjee's "Satyakam" (1969) and "Guddi" (1971) that gave him visibility.

> Asrani acted in more than 300 films over six decades. It was a lifetime of making movies, many roles forgettable and many that will stay on. He was an actor who adapted through the times. As the tone grew louder and more slapstick in the 1980s & 1990s, so did Asrani.

He was married to former actor Manju Bansal.

In a BBC podcast interview in August, the actor recalled how his move into the big league happened.

Gulzar and Mukherjee visited the FTII campus looking to cast a young actress for "Guddi".

Asrani introduced Mukherjee to Jaya Bhaduri but getting his own role was not so easy.

Finally, he managed to convince Mukherjee to cast him as Kundan, a young budding actor who comes to Bombay to become an actor but gets restricted to smaller parts.

It was the beginning of a lifelong partnership with the two. Though largely pigeonholed in supporting roles, Asrani made frequent efforts to break through.

He became a director with 1977's "Chala Murari Hero Banne", a partly autobiographical film in which he played the role of an aspiring actor facing exploitation. He also directed and acted in "Salaam Memsaab" (1979), "Hum Nahin Sudharenge" (1980), "Dil Hi To Hai" (1992) and the Rekha-starrer "Udaan" (1997).

None were successful and Asrani went back to comedy.

In 2016, he appeared in the adult comedy "Mastizaade", a project he regretted.

Asrani was the rare actor who spoke his mind, be it politics or the industry itself.

In his view, it was comedy legend Mehmood who introduced the concept of double-meaning dialogues in Hindi films.

Ahead of the 2014 elections, Asrani spoke out on the "Gujarat model" and backed the Congress.

Asrani's contribution wasn't limited to Hindi films.

Priyadarshan's upcoming two films -- "Haiwaan" and "Bhooth Bangla" -- will feature posthumous appearances by Asrani.

Through the years, he also made it a point to connect on social media platforms.

In fact, his last post was a Deepavali greeting to fans.

He died just a few hours later. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Brazil allows oil drilling near Amazon River

SAO PAULO, 21 OCT

Brazil's government has green-lit exploratory drilling by state-run oil giant Petrobras near the mouth of the Amazon River, just weeks before the UN climate conference in Belem, COP30. The Equatorial Margin deposit, stretching from the Suriname border to Brazil's Northeast, is believed to hold significant oil and gas reserves. Petrobras plans to commence drilling at block FZA-M-059, located 175 kilometres offshore in the northern state of Amapá. Energy Minister Alexandre Silveira stated, "The Equatorial Margin represents the future of our energy sovereignty. Brazil cannot give up knowing its potential," defending the decision's environmental responsibility. In June, Brazil auctioned multiple oil sites despite protests from environmentalists and Indigenous groups, aiming to expand production in unexplored areas. ***—PTI***

2,000 arrested in Myanmar scam centre raid

YANGON, 21 OCT

Myanmar's military has arrested 2,198 people in a major raid on the notorious KK Park scam centre near the Thai border, state media reported on Monday. The compound, located in Myawaddy Township in Kayin State, was allegedly run by international criminal syndicates involved in online scams, gambling, and money laundering. Troops also seized 30 Starlink satellites used to keep the network online during power cuts. The raid comes amid growing pressure from China and Thailand to crack down on such scam operations. A military spokesperson accused leaders of the Karen National Union, an ethnic armed group, of being linked to the centre's operations. ***—Agencies***

False alarm forces American Airlines flight to turn back

OMAHA, 21 OCT

An American Airlines flight returning to Omaha was forced to turn back on Monday after pilots mistakenly thought someone was attempting to breach the cockpit. The incident occurred aboard Flight 6469 less than 40 minutes into its journey to Los Angeles. According to an American Airlines spokesperson, the confusion arose when the intercom used for communication between pilots and flight attendants was inadvertently left on, causing static sounds that the pilots misinterpreted as a security threat. Operated by SkyWest, which services regional routes for American and other airlines, the plane was an Embraer ERJ 175. ***—PTI***

World Bank says rebuilding Syria may cost $216B

DAMASCUS, 21 OCT

Rebuilding Syria after over a decade of civil war is expected to cost about USD 216 billion, the World Bank said in an assessment published on Tuesday. The cost is almost ten times Syria's 2024 gross domestic product. Syria's civil war began in 2011 when mass protests against the government of then-President Bashar Assad were met with a brutal crackdown and spiralled into armed conflict. Assad was ousted in December in a lightning rebel offensive. The World Bank says the rebuilding may cost between USD 140 billion and USD 345 billion, but their "conservative best estimate" is USD 216 billion. The province of Aleppo and the Damascus countryside, where fierce battles took place, will require the most investment, according to the assessment. ***—PTI***

European leaders back Trump on Ukraine ceasefire

Say that fighting should stop at present battle lines

BRUSSELS/ KYIV, 21 OCT

European leaders, including from Britain, France, Germany and the European Union, issued a joint statement with Ukraine on Tuesday backing US President Donald Trump's call for a ceasefire at present battle lines.

"We strongly support President Trump's position that the fighting should stop immediately, and that the current line of contact should be the starting point of negotiations," the statement read. "We must ramp up the pressure on Russia's economy and its defence industry, until (Russian President Vladimir) Putin is ready to make peace. We are developing measures to use the full value of Russia's immobilised sovereign assets so that Ukraine has the resources it needs."

The statement was signed by Ukranian President Zelenskyy, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, France President Emmanuel Macron, Italian Prime Minister Giorgio Meloni, Poland Prime Minister Donald Tusk, EU President von der Leyen and others.

The statement said European leaders would meet later this week at an EU summit and in the format of the "Coalition of the Willing". Zelenskiy will attend the coalition of the willing meeting on Friday in London.

The EU President Ursula von der Leyen on X said, "We're united, more than ever, for a just and lasting peace for Ukraine. We support (Trump's) efforts to this end. Ukraine must be in the strongest position before, during and after any ceasefire."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen
PHOTO: PRESIDENT.GOV.UA

- A joint statement by nations like Ukraine, France, Germany and the UK said that pressure must be increased on Putin

Trump had on Sunday told reporters that Russia and Ukraine should stop fighting and resolve the "details" over territory at future talks. He proposed that battlelines be frozen where they currently stand with Russia control the occupied territory. The current front line runs through the Donbas region, an industrial hub. ***—Agencies***

Palestinians walk past the rubble in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip
PHOTO: ANI

Hamas 'committed to ending war' as Vance reaches Israel

TEL AVIV, 21 OCT

Israel said on Tuesday it had identified the body of a hostage that was released by Hamas overnight, while the group's chief negotiator said Hamas is determined to implement the ceasefire agreement as US Vice President JD Vance arrived on Tuesday. Accompanied by his wife Usha Vance, he will meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He is to hold a news conference Tuesday evening in Jerusalem.

Israel confirmed that Hamas released the body of Tal Haimi, who was killed on 7 Oct, 2023, and abducted from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak on the Gaza border. Israel is still waiting for Hamas to turn over the remains of 15 deceased hostages. Thirteen bodies have been released since the ceasefire began.

"From the day we signed the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement, we were determined and committed to seeing it through to the end," Hamas chief negotiator Khalil al-Hayya, said. He said the Sharm el-Sheikh summit, hosted by Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi and US President Donald Trump, represented "an international will declaring the war in Gaza is over."

On Sunday, Israel's military launched strikes killing 45 Palestinians. Israel said they were retaliatory measures after militants killed two soldiers.

Trump, for his part, told Hamas to be "good" or it would face "eradication". ***—Agencies***

> It looked almost like a nuclear bomb had been set off in that area
>
> Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and chief negotiator

Chaman border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It goes from Chaman District, Balochistan into Afghan's Spin Boldak ***PHOTO: DAWN***

Chaman crossing partially reopens after Pak-Afghan ceasefire

KARACHI, 21 OCT

The Chaman border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan has partially reopened following a ceasefire after violent clashes resulted in numerous fatalities on both sides. Afghan families began crossing from Balochistan province on Monday, alongside the movement of Afghan-bound containers.

The Chaman border had been closed due to the escalating conflict, leaving approximately 400 containers carrying goods stranded at the border. A similar situation unfolded at the Spin Boldak crossing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Nafees Jan Achakzai, President of the Chaman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, confirmed that the border had started reopening on Monday evening following a ceasefire agreement in Doha.

- Around 400 containers from Karachi have slowly resumed their journey into Afghanistan, and about 550 families, totalling around 3,400 individuals, have crossed, an official said

"Around 400 containers from Karachi have slowly resumed their journey into Afghanistan, and about 550 families, totalling around 3,400 individuals, have crossed over," he stated.

Many of these families were repatriated by the Pakistani government due to being in Karachi without proper documentation. Achakzai emphasised the need to fully restore trade activities to prevent further economic losses, as hundreds of goods-laden trucks remain stranded at the Karachi port. ***—PTI***

Trump vows to reach a 'fantastic deal' with Xi

WASHINGTON, 21 OCT

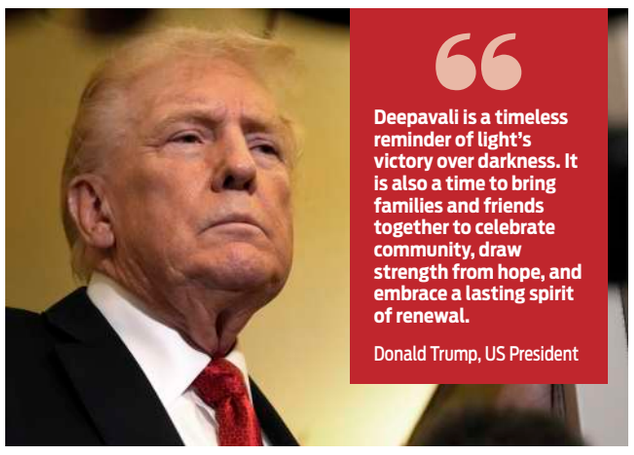
US President Donald Trump said on Monday that he will reach a "fantastic deal" with Chinese President Xi Jinping when the two leaders meet, while simultaneously saying that Beijing should strike a deal with Washington or face a total of 155 per cent tariffs starting 1 Nov.

"I think we're going to end up having a fantastic deal with China," Trump said. "It's going to be a great trade deal. It's going to be fantastic for both countries, and it's going to be fantastic for the entire world."

"We'll see what happens. I said, if we don't make a deal, I'm putting on an additional 100 per cent on 1 November. I think we'll make a deal," Trump said, while praising his relationship with Xi.

Trump's remarks come after Beijing infuriated him by expanding export controls on rare earth products that are used in smartphones, fighter jets, electric vehicles and more. Trump spoke as he hosted Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at the White House, celebrating an agreement with the US ally as a potential counterpoint to China's near-monopoly in processing those critical minerals.

The two leaders described the agreement as an USD 8.5 billion deal between the allies. Trump said it had been negotiated over several months. ***—Agencies***



> Deepavali is a timeless reminder of light's victory over darkness. It is also a time to bring families and friends together to celebrate community, draw strength from hope, and embrace a lasting spirit of renewal.
>
> Donald Trump, US President

GOVT STARTS DEMOLISHING WH WING FOR BALLROOM

The White House on Monday started tearing down part of the East Wing, the traditional base of operations for the First Lady, to build President Donald Trump's ballroom. Trump has said he's adding a massive a 90,000-square-foot ballroom because the East Room, which is the largest room in the White House with an approximately 200-person capacity, is too small and he does not like the idea of hosting events in pavilions on the South Lawn. The White House said the roughly $250 million project will be completed before his term ends in January 2029.

WH PRESS SECY RESPONDS TO SCRIBE'S QUERY WITH 'YOUR MOM'

When a journalist from the Huffington Post asked White House Press Secretary who chose Budapest as the venue for the Trump-Putin meet, she replied with "Your mom did." SV Dte, a veteran political reporter known for his critical coverage of Trump, texted Leavitt and asked why Budapest was chosen, given its history in relation to Ukraine and the Soviet Union. But Leavitt dismissed the question with a one-liner. When questioned further, she said "it is funny to me that you consider yourself a journalist."

I DON'T LIKE YOU EITHER: TRUMP TELLS AUS ENVOY AND EX-PM

Trump brazenly remarked "I don't like you" to Australia's ambassador and former prime minister Kevin Rudd during his meeting with Canberra's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at the White House. When a scribe asked Trump how he felt about Rudd's previous criticism about the US President, he said "Maybe he would like to apologise". Rudd began to explain, "That was before I took this position," but Trump cut him off and said "I don't like you either. I don't. And I probably never will."

ULTRACONSERVATIVE

Japan's Parliament elects Sanae Takaichi as first female PM

TOKYO, 21 OCT

Japan's Parliament has elected ultraconservative Sanae Takaichi as the country's first female Prime Minister, following a new coalition deal that pulls her ruling bloc further to the right.

Takaichi, 64, replaces Shigeru Ishiba, who resigned earlier on Tuesday after just one year in office. She secured 237 votes in the lower house, four over the required majority, defeating Yoshikoko Noda of the opposition Constitutional Democratic Party, who received 149 votes.

Her Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), reeling from a July election loss, formed a last-minute alliance with the right-wing Japan Innovation Party (JIP) after losing its longtime Centrist partner, Komeito. While this ensured her election, the alliance lacks a majority in both houses, raising doubts about the new government's stability.

Sanae Takaichi (right) during a press conference in Tokyo, Monday
PHOTO: PTI

Takaichi, a close ally of the late Shinzo Abe, is expected to pursue a nationalist agenda, stronger military, constitutional revision, and conservative social policies. She opposes same-sex marriage, gender reforms, and supports male-only imperial succession.

Her Cabinet will include allies of powerful LDP figure Taro Aso. She faces immediate challenges: addressing rising prices, preparing a policy speech and holding talks with US President Donald Trump.

Despite her historic role, Takaichi shows little urgency in promoting gender equality. Critics highlight her recent xenophobic remarks — though she recently softened. ***—PTI***

Ex-French Prez starts prison term

PARIS, 21 OCT

Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy arrived at a prison in Paris on Tuesday to begin serving a 5-year sentence for a criminal conspiracy to finance his 2007 election campaign with funds from Libya. He is the first ex-leader of modern France to be imprisoned.

Sarkozy was convicted last month, but en route to prison, he maintained that he was "an innocent man".

Sarkozy's lawyers said the former president will be held in solitary confinement, where he will be kept away from all other prisoners for security reasons.

Sarkozy contests both the conviction and a judge's unusual decision to incarcerate him pending appeal.

Before he entered the notorious La Sante prison, hundreds of supporters applauded and chanted "Nicolas, Nicolas" and sang the French anthem. Two French flags were hung on a nearby fence, with the inscriptions: "Courage Nicolas, return soon" and "true France with Nicolas."

Embattled Centrist President Emmanuel Macron hosted the Conservative Sarkozy at the presidential palace last week. "I have always been very clear in my public statements about the independence of the judiciary in my role, but it was normal on a human level to receive one of my predecessors,'' Macron said. ***—PTI***

Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy and his wife Carla Bruni-Sarkozy on Tuesday as Nicolas heads to prison. He was convicted of using Libyan funds to finance his 2007 election campaign ***PHOTO: PTI***

Coal import drops by 0.6% in August to 20.58MT

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

India's coal imports slipped marginally by 0.6 per cent to 20.58 million tonnes (MT) in August from 20.70 MT a year earlier, according to data from mjunction services. Total imports during April–August FY26 stood at 118.07 MT, down from 121.18 MT in the same period last fiscal. Non-coking coal imports declined to 11.55 MT from 13.04 MT, while coking coal imports rose to 4.82 MT from 4.53 MT. mjunction CEO Vinaya Varma said demand before the festive season remained subdued due to an extended monsoon, which dampened industrial activity. However, he noted that coal demand is likely to grow steadily in the medium to long term, driven by a strong pipeline of upcoming thermal power projects and continued energy requirements. —*PTI*

Jio-BP reports 34% rise in fuel sales

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Jio-BP, the Reliance-BP fuel retail joint venture, reported a 34 per cent increase in petrol and diesel sales in Q2 (July-September), reaching 1.8mkl, driven by strong margins and an expanding network of 2,057 outlets. Jet fuel (ATF) sales fell to 157,000kl due to reduced air traffic after stricter checks following the Ahmedabad Air India crash. The company holds a 3.59 per cent market share in petrol, 6.23 per cent in diesel, and 5.9 per cent in ATF. Jio-BP is also investing in clean energy, with 6,431 EV charging points and 107 CBG/CNG stations, and has added 142 convenience stores to enhance non-fuel revenue. —*PTI*

Mkts end higher in special Muhurat trading session

Sensex climbs by 63 points, while Nifty surges by 25 points

MUMBAI, 21 OCT

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally higher in the special one-hour Muhurat trading session on Tuesday, marking the beginning of the new Samvat Year 2082 on a positive note amid firm global cues.

The 30-share BSE Sensex rose 62.97 points or 0.07 per cent to close at 84,426.34. During the symbolic session, the benchmark hit a high of 84,665.44 and a low of 84,286.40.

The broader NSE Nifty went up by 25.45 points, or 0.10 per cent, to close at 25,868.60. As many as 25 Nifty stocks ended lower while 24 shares closed with gains and one remain unchanged.

Stock exchanges BSE and NSE conducted a special Muhurat trading session from 1.45pm to 2.45pm on Tuesday to mark the beginning of the new Samvat Year 2082, and the opening of new accounting books for traders and investors. On Monday the BSE Sensex jumped 4,974.31 points or 6.26 per cent and the Nifty climbed 1,637.8 points or 6.76 per cent.

Actors Aditya Seal, Anushka Ranjan, NSE MD & CEO Ashishkumar Chauhan and others ring the bell during the 'Muhurat Trading' session at the NSE, in Mumbai, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Muhurat trading is a one-hour symbolic trading session conducted by stock exchanges on the occasion of Deepavali, marking the start of the new Samvat year and new books of accounts by traders.

Among major Sensex gainers Bajaj Finserv rose the most by 1.42 per cent, Axis Bank gained 0.80 per cent, Infosys by 0.72 per cent, Mahindra & Mahindra by 0.60 per cent, Tata Motors by 0.55 per cent, Bajaj Finance by 0.53 per cent and Tata Steel by 0.52 per cent.

Broader markets also advanced with BSE Midcap rising 0.23 per cent, or 106.95 points, to close at 46,787.20. The BSE SmallCap gained 0.91 per cent, or 486.81 points, to settle at 53,842.85. —*PTI*

CHINA FILES COMPLAINT

India's auto, EV PLI policy violates WTO norms: China

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

China has lodged a formal complaint at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) against India's key manufacturing incentive schemes, alleging they breach global trade rules.

The dispute concerns India's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) programmes for advanced chemistry cell battery storage, automobiles and auto components, and electric passenger vehicle manufacturing. Beijing claims these initiatives violate India's obligations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM), and the Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMs) Agreement. According to China, the PLI schemes favour domestic over imported goods, discriminating against Chinese-origin products and undermining benefits due to China as a WTO member.

The complaint marks the first stage in the WTO's dispute settlement process, as China has formally requested consultations with India to resolve the issue. If the discussions fail to produce an outcome within the prescribed time, Beijing can ask WTO to set up a dispute settlement panel to adjudicate the matter. The development comes at a time of high economic friction between the two nations and a widening trade gap, which touched $99.2 billion last fiscal year, driven largely by India's rising imports of machinery, chemicals, and electronic goods from China.

India introduced the PLI schemes to strengthen domestic manufacturing, create employment opportunities, attract global investment, and reduce dependence on imports in key sectors such as electric mobility and renewable energy storage. —*PTI*

Fertiliser prices may soar as China halts export

India is preparing for a rise in fertiliser prices ahead of the vital rabi (winter) crop season after China suspended exports of urea and specialty fertilisers from 15 October, industry officials said. China, which had allowed limited exports between May and October, has now halted shipments indefinitely, affecting global markets. The suspension includes products such as Technical Monoammonium Phosphate (TMAP), AdBlue, DAP and urea. According to Soluble Fertilizer Industry Association President Rajib Chakraborty, the curbs could last five to six months, pushing specialty fertiliser prices up by 10–15 per cent. India imports around 95 per cent of these products from China and consumes about 250,000 tonnes annually, most of it during the rabi season. —*PTI*

Sri Lanka FDI surges 138% driven by Adani-funded Colombo terminal

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Sri Lanka's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows soared to $827 million in the first nine months of 2025, marking a 138 per cent surge compared with the same period last year, the Board of Investment (BOI) announced on Tuesday.

The sharp rise was driven primarily by the Colombo West International Terminal (CWIT) project, which contributed $229 million, the largest single FDI source during the period.

The CWIT is a landmark public-private partnership between India's Adani International Port Holdings Pte Ltd, John Keells Holdings PLC, and the Sri Lanka Ports Authority.

The investment, channelled into advanced port infrastructure under a strategic development agreement, is designed to expand the Port of Colombo's capacity by 3.2 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), reinforcing its position as South Asia's leading transshipment hub and a key maritime gateway.

According to the BOI, the overall investment inflows included $133 million in equity capital, $132 million in reinvested earnings, $231 million in intra-company borrowings, and $331 million from long-term foreign commercial loans.

Around $124 million was secured through new project agreements signed this year, while the remainder came from reinvestments and expansions by existing enterprises operating under BOI-approved frameworks.

BOI Chairman Arjuna Herath hailed the figures as a strong indicator of investor confidence, crediting the growth to government reforms, improved policy stability, and initiatives aimed at enhancing the ease of doing business. . —*PTI*

GST REFORMS MAY TRIGGER SURGE IN PAPER IMPORTS

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Indian paper industry has raised concern over the potential surge in paper imports following the recent GST reforms, warning that the move could erode domestic competitiveness and undermine the government's flagship 'Make in India' initiative.

Indian Paper Manufacturers Association (IPMA) President Pawan Agarwal, in a statement, said that with the recent GST changes, India risks becoming a further dumping ground for cheaper paper from abroad. Paper imports into India have already doubled in the last four years. —*PT*

Tariff on trans-shipment raises compliance concerns: Moody's

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Moody's Ratings has cautioned that the United States' new 40 per cent trans-shipment tariff will create major compliance challenges for companies across India and the ASEAN region, with the greatest risks for sectors such as machinery, electrical equipment, and semiconductors.

Announced by US President Donald Trump on 31 July, the tariff applies to goods deemed to have been trans-shipped — those passing through third countries — in addition to broader country-level duties. Moody's, in its Trade – Asia-Pacific report, said the definition of "trans-shipment" remains unclear but appears primarily aimed at Chinese-origin products routed through nations with lower tariffs.

The ratings agency warned that uncertainty around the policy could disrupt regional trade. If US takes a narrow view, targeting only goods minimally processed or relabeled from China, the overall impact may be limited. However, a broader interpretation — penalising products containing any significant Chinese inputs — could have damaging effects on Asia-Pacific supply chains.

Moody's added that exporters across ASEAN may face tighter due diligence and certification requirements to prove "substantial transformation" and avoid penalties. This underscores growing trade scrutiny, as trans-shipment practices, have increasingly been used to obscure product origins amid US-China trade tensions. —*PTI*

RBI sold $7.7B in August to curb rupee volatility in forex market

MUMBAI, 21 OCT

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) sold USD 7.7 billion in August to ease volatility in the foreign exchange market and halt the rupee's decline against the US dollar. The net sale of dollars was nearly three times higher than the previous month, while no purchases were made in July or August, according to the RBI's latest bulletin.

The central bank emphasises that it does not target a specific rupee–dollar level, intervening only in cases of excessive volatility. The rupee fell 1.6 per cent against the dollar in August and continued to weaken in September amid global uncertainties, trade tensions, and ongoing foreign portfolio investment outflows.

RBI RAISES RS 17,000 CR

In a related development, the RBI announced the results of the State Government Securities (SGS) auction held on 20 October, 2025, raising Rs 17,000 crore. The securities, with maturities ranging from seven to twenty-six years, carried cut-off yields of 6.99–7.36 per cent. Eleven securities were offered by Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, attracting competitive bids worth Rs 69,599.48 crore, of which Rs 16,607.85 crore was accepted, alongside Rs 392.15 crore in non-competitive bids.

Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh raised Rs 2,000 crore each, Maharashtra and Rajasthan Rs 5,000 crore each, and Tamil Nadu Rs 4,000 crore.

The auction reflects strong demand for state borrowings in a stable domestic market. —*PTI*

INDIA'S DEEPAVALI SALES HITS RECORD OF ₹6L CR: CAIT

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

India's Deepavali sales touched a record Rs 6.05 lakh crore -- comprising Rs 5.40 lakh crore in goods and Rs 65,000 crore in services -- buoyed by the recent GST reform and strong consumer sentiment, traders' lobby CAIT said on Tuesday.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) based its findings on a nation-wide survey across 60 major distribution centres including state capitals and Tier 2 & 3 cities conducted by its research wing. Last year, the Deepavali sales stood at Rs 4.25 lakh crore, according to CAIT.

Mainline retail -- particularly non-corporate and traditional markets -- contributed 85 per cent to the total trade, underscoring a powerful comeback of India's physical markets and small traders, CAIT stated.

Consumers also expressed greater satisfaction with stable pricing, which boost sustained festive spending.` —*PTI*

THOUSANDS IMPACTED

Amazon outage: Expert explains vulnerabilities of relying on 'cloud'

MELBOURNE, 21 OCT

The world's largest cloud computing platform, Amazon Web Services (AWS), has experienced a major outage that has impacted thousands of organisations, including banks, financial software platforms such as Xero, and social media platforms such as Snapchat.

The outage began at roughly 6pm AEDT on Monday.

It was caused by a malfunction at one of AWS' data centres located in Northern Virginia in the United States. AWS says it has fixed the underlying issue but some internet users are still reporting service disruptions.

This incident highlights the vulnerabilities of relying so much on cloud computing – or "the cloud" as it's often called. But there are ways to mitigate some of the risks.

RENTING IT INFRASTRUCTURE

Cloud computing is the on-demand delivery of diverse IT resources such as computing power, database storage, and applications over the internet. In simple terms, it's renting (not owning) your own IT infrastructure.

Cloud computing came into prevalence with the dot com boom in the late 1990s, wherein digital tech companies started to deliver software over the internet.

As companies such as Amazon matured in their own ability to offer what's known as "software as a service" over the web, they started to offer others the ability to rent their virtual servers for a cost as well.

This was a lucrative value proposition.

Cloud computing enables a pay-as-you-go model similar to a utility bill, rather than the huge upfront investment required to purchase, operate and manage your own data centre.

As a result, the latest statistics suggest more than 94 per cent of all enterprises use cloud-based services in some form.

A MARKET DOMINATED BY THREE COMPANIES

The global cloud market is dominated by three companies. AWS holds the largest share (roughly 30 per cent). It's followed by Microsoft Azure (about 20 per cent) and Google Cloud Platform (about 13 per cent).

All three service providers have had recent outages, significantly impacting digital service platforms. For example, in 2024, an issue with third-party software severely impacted Microsoft Azure, causing extensive operational failures for businesses globally.

Google Cloud Platform also experienced a major outage this year due to an internal misconfiguration.

PROFOUND RISKS

The heavy reliance of the global internet on just a few major providers — AWS, Azure, and Google Cloud — creates profound risks for both businesses and everyday users.

First, this concentration forms a single point of failure. As seen in the latest AWS event, a simple configuration error in one central system can trigger a domino effect that instantly paralyses vast segments of the internet.

Second, these providers often impose vendor lock-in. Companies find it prohibitively difficult and expensive to switch platforms due to complex data architectures and excessively high fees charged for moving large volumes of data out of the cloud (data egress costs). This effectively traps customers, leaving them hostage to a single vendor's terms.

Finally, the dominance of US-based cloud service providers introduces geopolitical and regulatory risks. Data stored in these massive systems is subject to US laws and government demands, which can complicate compliance with international data sovereignty regulations such as Australia's Privacy Act.

Furthermore, these companies hold the power to censor or restrict access to services, giving them control over how firms operate. The current best practice to mitigate these risks is to adopt a multi-cloud approach that enables you to decentralise. This involves running critical applications across multiple vendors to eliminate the single point of failure.

This approach can be complemented by what's known as "edge computing", wherein data storage and processing is moved away from large, central data centres, toward smaller, distributed nodes (such as local servers) that firms can control directly.

The combination of edge computing and a multi-cloud approach enhances resilience, improves speed, and helps companies meet strict data regulatory requirements while avoiding dependence on any single entity.

As the old saying goes, don't put all of your eggs in one basket. —*PTI*

American chess Grandmaster Daniel dies at 29

NEW YORK, 21 OCT

Daniel Naroditsky, a chess Grandmaster who started as a child prodigy and quickly became one of the most influential American voices in the sport, died Monday. He was 29. The Charlotte Chess Center in North Carolina, where Naroditsky trained and worked as a coach, announced his death on social media, calling him "a talented chess player, educator, and beloved member of the chess community." "Let us remember Daniel for his passion and love for the game of chess, and for the joy and inspiration he brought to us all every day," his family said in a statement shared by the center. The cause of death was not immediately known. Naroditsky became a Grandmaster, the highest title in chess aside from World Chess Champion, at the age of 18.—*PTI*

Boxing squad departs for Asian Youth Games

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

A 23-member Indian boxing contingent has departed for Manama, Bahrain, to compete in the third Asian Youth Games beginning on 23 October. The squad includes standout names such as Dhruv Kharb, Udham Singh Raghav, Khushi Chand, Ahaana Sharma, and Chandrika Bhoreshi Pujari, all national gold medallists who have been at the forefront of India's recent youth boxing success. The team also features several boxers who impressed at the Asian U-17 Championships in July 2025, where India won 43 medals to finish second overall. —*PTI*

Lakshya bows out of French Open after first-round

PARIS, 21 OCT

India's Lakshya Sen bowed out of the French Open Super 750 badminton tournament after suffering a straight-game defeat to Ireland's Nhat Nguyen in the men's singles opening round here on Tuesday. Lakshya, who had reached the finals of the Hong Kong Open, looked off-color from the start to eventually go down 7-21, 16-21 to the world number 29 Nhat. Last week, the 24-year-old from Almora had defeated Nhat in a three-game opener at Denmark Open, but he was erratic in Paris, repeatedly hitting wide and into the net while struggling to find rhythm against his opponent's steep smashes. The Indian's deep tosses often missed the lines, and his attacking play lacked precision as he trailed 2-7 early in the opening game.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@PCB

Shaheen replaces Rizwan as Pakistan ODI captain

KARACHI, 21 OCT

Senior pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi will replace Muhammad Rizwan as the new ODI captain of Pakistan starting next month, the country's cricket board has announced amid speculation that the sudden change of guard was pushed by white-ball head coach Mike Hesson. The Pakistan Cricket Board announced that Shaheen will lead Pakistan in the three-match ODI series against South Africa in Faisalabad from November 4-8. The decision, the board said, was taken at a meeting in Islamabad attended by the national selectors, advisory board members, and Hesson. While the PCB has not cited any official reason for the switch.—*PTI*

Pant to lead India A in prelude to Test series vs SA

Test series against SA begins on 14 November in Kolkata

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

India wicket-keeper batter Rishabh Pant was on Tuesday appointed captain of the national A side for a red-ball series against South Africa A after fully recovering from a foot fracture sustained during the tour of England.

Pant had injured his foot while batting in the fourth Test at Manchester in July and subsequently was not part of the Asia Cup squad and, more recently, the two-Test home series against the West Indies. He was struck on his right toe by a Chris Woakes delivery but came out to bat heroically, scoring a half-century, albeit in a lost cause.

The selectors have named him in the India A squad for both games, to be held in Bengaluru from 30 October. The A series will give Pant valuable game time ahead of the two-match home Test series against South Africa beginning 14 November in Kolkata.

Some other prominent names that will feature during the course of the two four-day games include KL Rahul, Sai Sudharsan, who has been named vice-captain, Devdutt Padikkal, wicket-keeper Dhruv Jurel, pacers Mohammed Siraj and Prasidh Krishna, among others. All six were a part of the squad for the West Indies Tests. Prasidh, Siraj, Akash Deep, and Jurel will play the second game, from November 6 to 9, during the short series. N Jagdeesan will be the second wicketkeeper in the squad for the first match.

Rishabh Pant was appointed captain of the national A side PHOTO: PTI

Sudharsan, whose technique was tested against the West Indies spinners, would be looking to improve that aspect of the game.

India regulars like Rahul, Siraj, Krishna, and Jurel are part of the squad for the second game beginning November 6.

Akash Deep, who has not played Test cricket since the tour of England, is also available for the second unofficial Test. Among the domestic performers, it will be interesting to see how pacers Gurnoor Brar and Khaleel Ahmed fare.

South Africa's A team, to be captained by batter Marques Ackerman, will feature senior team captain Temba Bavuma, who will be returning after recuperating from a calf injury. —*PTI*

WODI Rankings: Mandhana on top

Indian vice-captain Smriti Mandhana remained on top in the Women's ODI Batter Rankings, extending her lead over England skipper Nat Brunt by 83 points in the latest list published by the ICC on Tuesday.In the bowling section, Indian off-spinner Deepti Sharma has moved up to third place with left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone from England leading the charts.Mandhana has scored consecutive half-centuries in the ongoing World Cup, with her most recent effort coming against England when she contributed a stylish innings of 88 during a narrow loss for India in Indore.

NAQVI REFUSES TO BUDGE

BCCI gets SL, Afghan support on Asia Cup trophy fiasco

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

The deadlock over the Asia Cup trophy, which is yet to reach champions India, continues to be unresolved as the Asian Cricket Council's Pakistani head Mohsin Naqvi has refused to part with it despite a fresh missive from the BCCI, backed by boards of Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

A top ACC source told PTI that Naqvi has insisted that a BCCI representative collect the trophy from him at the body's headquarters in Dubai, but the Indian board has rejected that stance. The BCCI will bring this matter up in an ICC meeting next month.

"The BCCI secretary, BCCI's ACC representative Rajeev Shukla, and representatives of other member boards, including Sri Lanka Cricket and Afghanistan, had written to the ACC president last week over handing the trophy to India," the ACC source said.

"But he responded that someone from BCCI should come to Dubai and take the trophy from him. So that matter has still not moved. BCCI has made its stance clear that it won't be receiving the trophy from him. So the matter will most likely be decided in the ICC meeting," he added.

The ICC is headed by former BCCI secretary Jay ShahThe trophy has been at the ACC headquarters after the Indian team refused to accept it from Naqvi at the presentation ceremony, prompting him to walk away with it in an unprecedented turn of events. Naqvi is also the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board and his country's interior minister.

The Indians had refused to shake hands with their Pakistani counterparts during the entire Asia Cup as a mark of respect for the victims of the Pahalgam terror attack.

The two teams played each other every Sunday of the three-week tournament. —*PTI*

Australia, England to battle for supremacy before semifinals

INDORE, 21 OCT

With semifinal berths already secured, defending champions Australia and familiar foes England will look to maintain their winning momentum when they face off in a top-of-the-table clash at the ICC Women's World Cup here on Wednesday.

Australia vs England Match starts at 3.00 pm IST

Both teams remain unbeaten so far, with four wins and a washout each, but Australia sit comfortably atop the points table owing to a superior net run rate of 1.818 as compared to England's 1.490.

A victory for either side will offer more than just top-of-the-table bragging rights; it will also provide a crucial psychological edge heading into the knockouts, which are just around the corner.

Alyssa Healy's Australia has been clinical, if not flawless, through the group stage. They began their campaign with two batting collapses, but rescue acts from Ashleigh Gardner and Beth Mooney steered them past New Zealand and Pakistan.

Australia captain Alyssa Healy will miss Wednesday's ICC Women's World Cup clash against England here due to a calf injury, with Tahlia McGrath set to lead the seven-time champions. —*PTI*

RICKY PONTING QUESTIONS

'Are Virat, Rohit in form for 2027 WC?'

DUBAI, 21 OCT

Australian great Ricky Ponting reckons the performance of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma in the ongoing ODI series Down Under will determine if the star India duo can carry on till the 2027 World Cup.

Playing their first game for India since March, Kohli and Rohit, who are now one-format players, did not last long against Australia's potent pace attack on a bouncy Perth track. Having said that, it was also a collective batting failure for India, who lost by seven wickets.

VIRAT KOHLI AND ROHIT SHARMA PHOTO: PTI

The second ODI of the three-match series takes place in Adelaide on Thursday, where conditions should suit the Indian batters a lot more compared to Perth. Speaking on 'ICC Review' alongside former India head coach Ravi Shastri, Ponting said setting short-term goals is the way forward for the celebrated duo rather than only thinking about the 2027 ODI World Cup.

Short expects Aussie pacers to target Kohli

Australia batter Matthew Short believes his team's pacers will continue to exploit Virat Kohli's recent weakness outside off stump when India face Australia in the second ODI here on Thursday.

Kohli, who was dismissed for a duck in the series opener in Perth, will be eager to bounce back at the Adelaide Oval, his most successful overseas venue with five international centuries and an average of 65 across formats. "I'm not in the fast-bowling meetings, but that seems to be the way he has been getting out recently," Short told reporters."Some of the guys like 'Hoff' (Josh Hazlewood) and 'Starcy' (Starc), they have bowled a lot against him, they know what they're doing. —*PTI*

Stubbs, de Zorzi dig in after Maharaj's 7 spins out Pakistan

RAWALPINDI, 21 OCT

Sometimes, when Test cricket is played well, it can be slightly dull and the pair of Tony de Zorzi and Tristan Stubbs made no apologies for prioritising good cricket over entertaining cricket for the second half of the day. South Africa were much better placed going into the third day than they had been at any time this series, 148 runs short of Pakistan's first innings 333 with six wickets still in hand. That they were not further adrift came thanks to a heroic shift early in the morning from Keshav Maharaj, who took all five Pakistani wickets to top up his two overnight, inducing a 17-run collapse for Pakistan's bottom half.

It might have been all so different if Pakistan - usually so trigger-happy when bringing the third umpire into the game had done so in the 26th over. Sajid Khan had pushed de Zorzi, batting on 5, onto the back foot as the ball flicked him just above the knee roll. Short leg held onto it, and Pakistan, distracted by an appeal for the catch, failed to consider lbw might be a more plausible shout. Down to just one review, they passed it up only for HawkEye to show three reds.

It was a rare chance either de Zorzi or Stubbs offered as they settled into the tedium of steady accumulation, aware that one wicket could bring a surge from Pakistan that might wash away their challenge entirely.

South Africa 185 for 4 (Stubbs 68*, de Zorzi 55, Asif Afridi 2-24) trail Pakistan 333 (Shakeel 66, Agha 45, Maharaj 7-102) by 148 runs. —*PTI*

FIDE WC Chess C'ship in Goa from 31 Oct

PANAJI, 21 OCT

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday launched the logo and anthem for the 2025 FIDE World Cup Chess Championship to be held in the coastal state from October 31 to November 27.

The World Cup winner will not only take home the championship title but also secure one of three coveted spots in the 2026 Candidates Tournament, the penultimate stage leading to the World Chess Championship, the organizers said in a statement released during the event.

Among the top contenders are some of the biggest names in world chess, including Gukesh D, Arjun Erigaisi, Praggnanandhaa R, Anish Giri, Wesley So, Vincent Keymer, Hans Niemann, Nodirbek Abdusattorov, Ian Nepomniachtchi, Richard Rapport, Vidit Gujrathi, Nihal Sarin, and many more, the organisers said.

The tournament will also feature Faustino Oro, the 12-year-old Argentinian prodigy, who will make history as the youngest participant in the 2025 edition. Indian rising star Divya Deshmukh joins the Open Section via a wild-card entry, following a last-minute withdrawal by another participant, they said.

Sawant unveiled the logo and anthem for the international chess event in the presence of state Sports Minister Ramesh Tawadkar, All India Chess Federation President Nitin Narang, secretary Dev Patel, and Goa's Chief Secretary V Candavelou.

He said that 82 countries will be participating in the event, which will take Goa to a global level and also boost sports and tourism in the state. This will, in the long run, encourage new chess talent from Goa, he added. —*PTI*

Syndrela-Divyanshi pair rises to World No. 1

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT

Syndrela Das and Divyanshi Bhowmick have achieved a historic milestone by climbing to the No. 1 spot in the latest ITTF Under-19 Girls' Doubles World Rankings, released on Tuesday.

The Indian duo topped the global standings with 3910 points, ahead of Chinese Taipei's Wu Jia-En and Wu Ying-Syuan (3195) and France's Leana Hochart and Nina Guo Zheng (3170).In another first for Indian table tennis, six Indian girls have broken into the top 100 of the world doubles rankings, underlining the country's steady rise in youth development.

Syndrela and Divyanshi's ascent to the top is the result of a string of strong performances at both domestic and international events. The pair has captured gold medals at the WTT Youth Contender in Goa and WTT Youth Star Contender in Tunis, in addition to semifinal finishes at the WTT Youth Contender in Berlin and Lima.

Among other Indians, Taneesha Kotecha and Sayali Wani are placed 13th with 1575 points, after impressive runs at the Asian Youth Championships and WTT Youth Contender Doha. —*PTI*

Victoria Mboko PHOTO: WTA

Mboko eager to build on 'crazy' breakthrough year

TOKYO, 21 OCT

Canadian teenager Victoria Mboko finished last year ranked 350th in the world, but she is now just outside the top 20 and determined to move "onwards and upwards" next season.

The 19-year-old won her first WTA title at her home Canadian Open in August, beating top seed Coco Gauff in the last 16 before downing former world number one Naomi Osaka in the final.

Mboko is competing at the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo this week and started her campaign with a 6-3, 6-3 win over compatriot Bianca Andreescu on Tuesday.

Mboko, now ranked 23 in the world, said her breakthrough year had been "crazy".

"I can look back and at least feel good about what I've been able to do," the teenager said.

"I would have never thought at all that I'd be where I am today. It's just building onwards and upwards, and hopefully for the next year, I can build some sort of momentum and keep it very positive within myself," she added.

Mboko went through a slump after winning the title in Montreal, losing in the first round at her next four tournaments without even taking a set. —*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

West Ham falls to another home loss

LONDON, 21 OCT

West Ham lost the fourth home match in a row in the Premier League on Monday, with late goals in both halves giving Brentford a 2-0 win that could have been much bigger had the visitors taken more of their chances.

Going into the game, West Ham had lost all three of its home games this season while Brentford had lost all three of its away games in the league, but the visitors dominated from the start at the London Stadium.Igor Thiago and Kevin Schade both missed good opportunities to score before Thiago finally broke the deadlock two minutes before halftime. The Hammers defense failed to deal with long ball and Schade squared to Thiago to score.

Goalkeeper Alphonse Areola got a hand to his shot but could not stop it going over the line.Some West Ham fans boycotted the game in protest at what they say is mismanagement by the club's owners and there were more empty seats than usual at the former Olympic stadium, which became the club's home in 2016 after moving from Upton Park. They missed little as the home side was second best throughout against a team that had 22 shots on goal to West Ham's seven. Nevertheless, it took Brentford until the 94th minute to get a second goal. Another long ball flummoxed the West Ham defense and Keane Lewis-Potter cut back for Mathias Jensen to slam home."It probably could've been more," Brentford midfielder Mikkel said. —*PTI*

Kevin Schade PHOTO: X/@PREMIERLEAGUE